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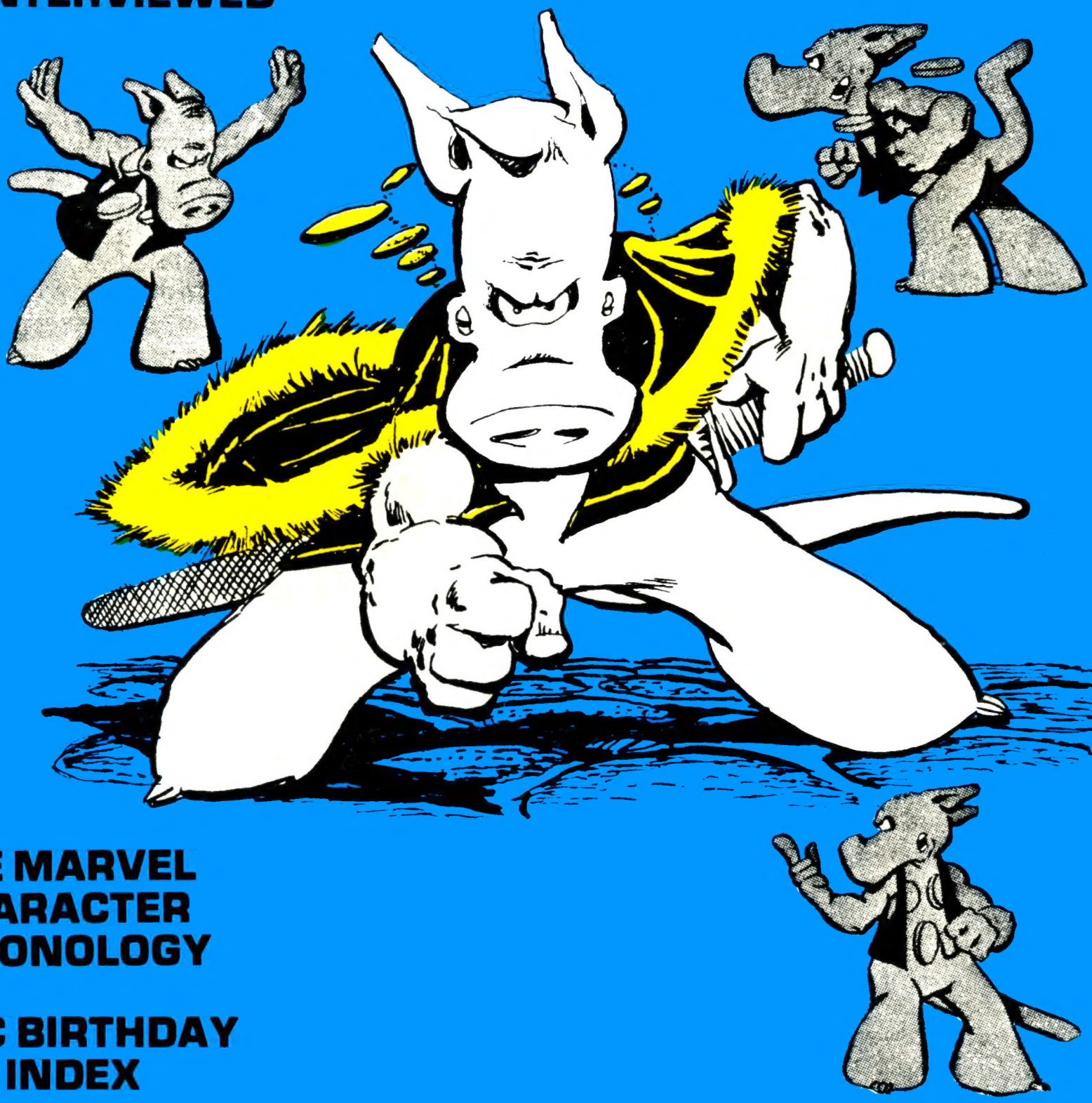

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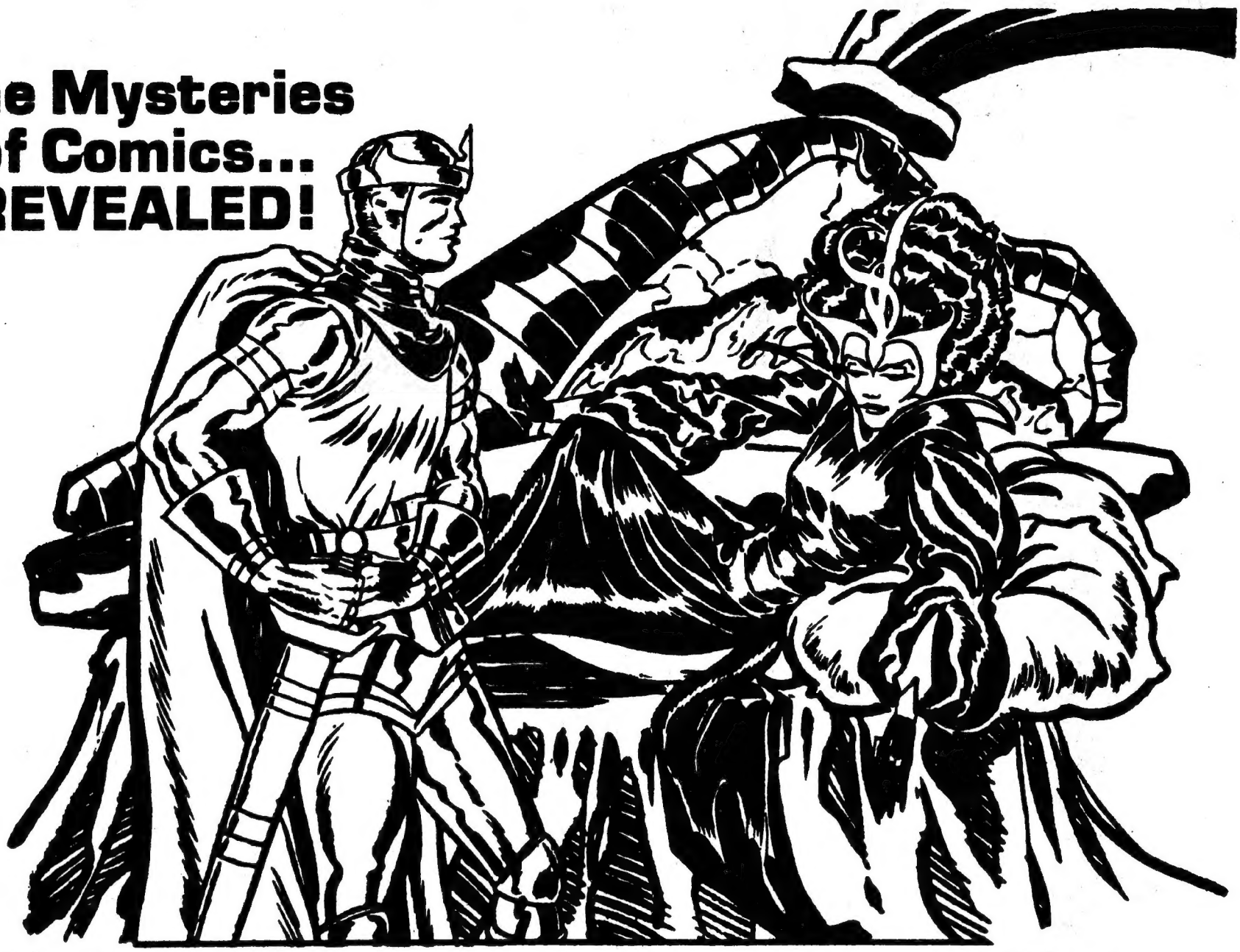

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FOUR-COLOR WORDS: by Murray R. Ward

"In the early 1950's, the McCarthy witchhunts had just begun, a sweeping, fanatical indictment that would affect all entertainment media and all who worked in them. Films, books, television and even comics came under the gun."

"The creators of the comics field did not foresee the advent of the witchhunters, nor even that there would be a time when they would be forced to implement a self-imposed comics code, a board of censorship that deemed what could be in comics and what could not."

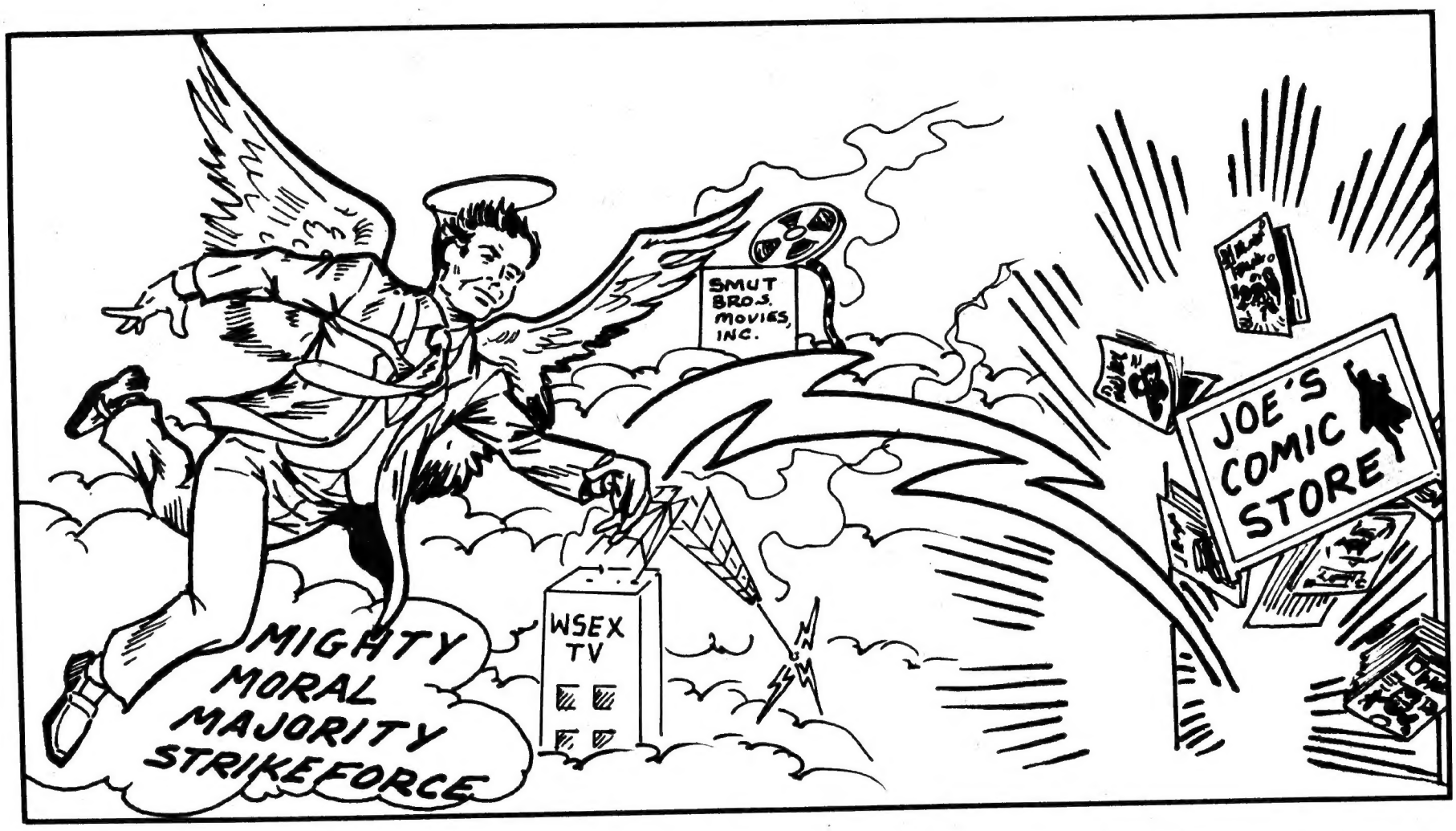
"Comic books were now subject to open attack. William Gaines and EC comics were under seige. Critics claimed that comic books led children to juvenile delinquency. Others intimated that comics were part of a Communist plot to undermine American youth. Public comic book burnings took place."

—from "The Gene Colan Interview"
by Don McGregor, COMICS SCENE #5

"Those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

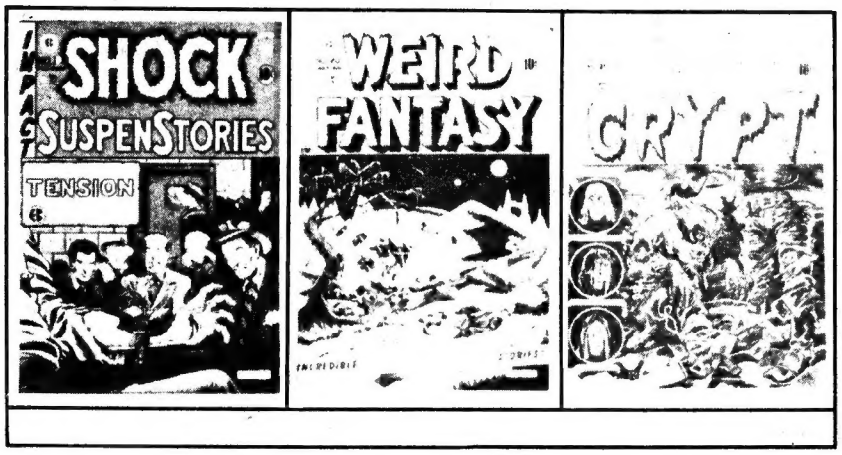
—George Santayana, 1863-1952

ON CENSORSHIP IN COMICS

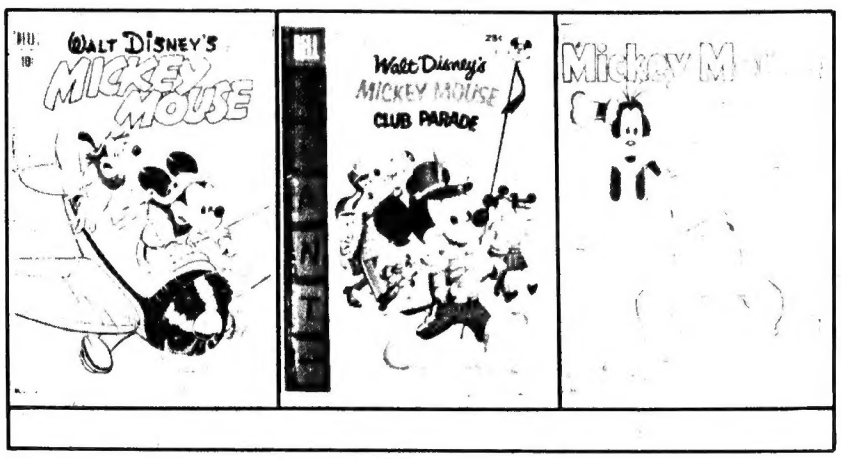


For myself, I confess I had done little thinking on the matter of censorship in comics. By the time I was old enough to read comics myself, rather than have them read to me. the Comics Code had been established, and since my main fare at the time was Dell funny-animal comics, I never really understood the need for a Code. When the late Fredric Wertham - comics' version of "Tailgunner Joe" - was making his cause known in **Seduction of the Innocent** and the EC horror and various crime comics were being forced to fold, I was still occupied with getting out of diapers. In my experience then, the Comics Code seal on the covers of comics [many times larger in those days than later] had always been there and its Dell equivalent was the "Dell Pledge to Parents" usually found on their books' inside back cover or final page.

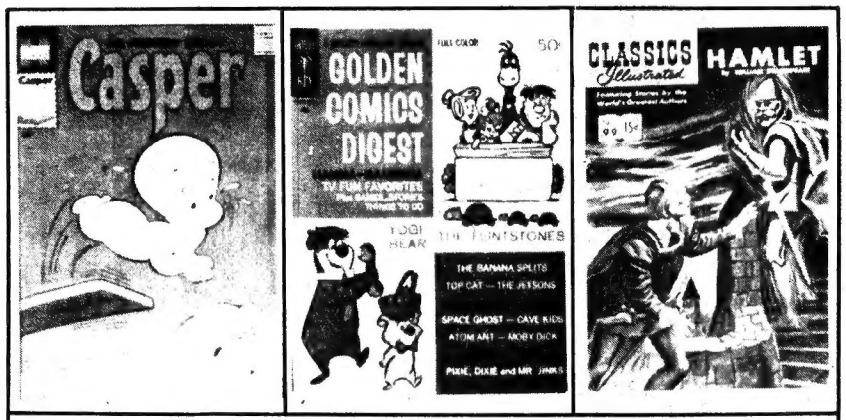
As I grew older, my tastes in comics naturally changed and I only belatedly noticed that the comics market was changing to reflect them as well. I had a brief fling or two with the Harvey line of Casper the Friendly Ghost and Company while mainly reading Dell's line of Walt Disney, Warner Brothers, Walter Lantz, Hanna-Barbera, M-G-M, Terrytoons and King Features characters [among others]; I enjoyed Little Archie from his first issue and later came to comprehend the dating humor of the elder Archie's many titles [Jughead was the best and easiest to understand, since like Little Archie he was not interested in girls]; and the only DCs I ever read were Sugar and Spike, The Three Mouseketeers and The Fox and The Crow, from whose ads I was familiar with the Superman and Batman families of characters. Just as I began to lose interest in funny-animals, Dell was



metamorphosed into Gold Key with its oversized issues, borderless panels and square word balloons which strangenesses sustained my interest a while longer. Eventually though, the Gold Keys began to look all alike and I moved on to the DC super-heroes whose adventures I had been reading on the sly, borrowing from friends but not buying due to allowance limitations. From there I rapidly discovered the then-fledgling Marvel line and became one of the very earliest members of the M.M.M.S. At the time, the popular wisdom in just-a'borning comics fandom had it that Warren magazines would be the "new EC" and the next step above Marvels in comics maturity [just as Marvels, with their problem-ridden heroes, were thought more mature than DCs, and DCs more mature than anything else]. [Bear with us fans of a bygone day, you younger readers: it was not for another five years that we discovered that the just-retired "Good Duck Artist" had been a gent named Carl Barks.] Never having experienced the original ECs, I was not excited over the prospects of new ones, and besides, my allowance ruled out magazines in those days so I let the Warrens sit on the racks.

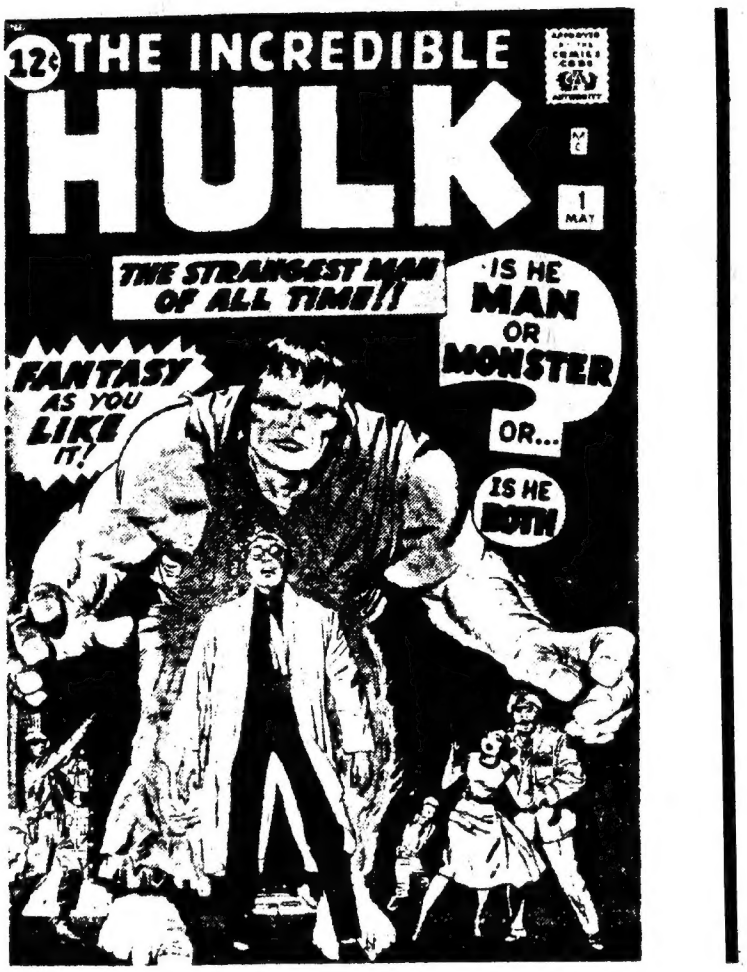


What I didn't really take note of was that as I left each type of comics behind, they began to cease to be, like unto pantheons of pagan deities in whom no one still believed. Casper lost his position as Harvey's #1 character to Richie Rich, a sort-of spendthrift Uncle Scrooge who specialized in bad puns on money-related words; Archie found religion and social consciousness and forgot to be funny, while Little Archie took up chasing girls, an activity formerly beneath his dignity; the only good Gold Key titles were reprints of the stuff I'd already read as a child; and DC's humor line evaporated by the late 60's except for the occasional half-hearted attempt to steal some of the Archie market with Binky, Scooter and the like. The formerly-charming Weisinger "Superman Family" first became silly, then disappeared with Uncle Mort's resignation; Batman turned to camp as he received his own TV show and only lived on [following the show's cancellation] by changing into a character inspired by his original 40's incarnation but somewhat alien to a child of the 50's; the other DC heroes suffered from "Batman-itis" and had to struggle to survive after camp died its deserved death. The Marvels persisted [although there was a point about 1969-70 when only the Roy Thomas titles - which refused to adhere to the thankfully short-lived new policy of "no more continued stories" - really interested me] and eventually underwent a subtle change in the 70's under Thomas's editorship: new titles appeared left and right, while a change in the wording of the Code allowed vampires, werewolves and other previously verboten creatures to appear prominently.



Since I was only paying attention to the books "I" was reading, I was only subliminally aware that the books I no longer read no longer existed. I was becoming older and more mature; comics were becoming older and more mature: a happy state of affairs, without which I would have had to quit reading comics altogether. I remained single and thus had no children and I associated with no children; having suffered no end of abuse from my peers as a child, I was happy to no longer be one: ergo, I forgot that children still existed and read comics.

This lapse was finally brought home to me in the last year by the children of my younger sisters. One little nephew in particular is very familiar with Superman from the movies, Spider-Man from the cartoons, the Hulk from the live-action TV show and anything to do with Star Wars from the merchandising [albeit he had not seen the film till after The Empire Strikes Back premiered]. Visiting me, he was astonished to discover the existence of other super-hero characters such as those depicted on the posters on my walls. "Who's he?" he would ask, followed by "what does he do?", which meant "what powers does he have?" or "what's his shtick?". He was particularly taken with the Flash [once I explained that he was not the same guy as Flash Gordon whom he knew from the movie and cartoon] and Kid Flash, and with the idea that Daredevil, though blind, could perform Spider-Man-like feats by dint of his "radar-sense" [try explaining radar-sense to a five-year-old some time]. Requests to "Read me some Superman" brought out the Movie Tabloid and the reprint digests; requests for Flash with Kid Flash as a little kid, not a teenager, produced my collection of early Silver Age FLASH comics



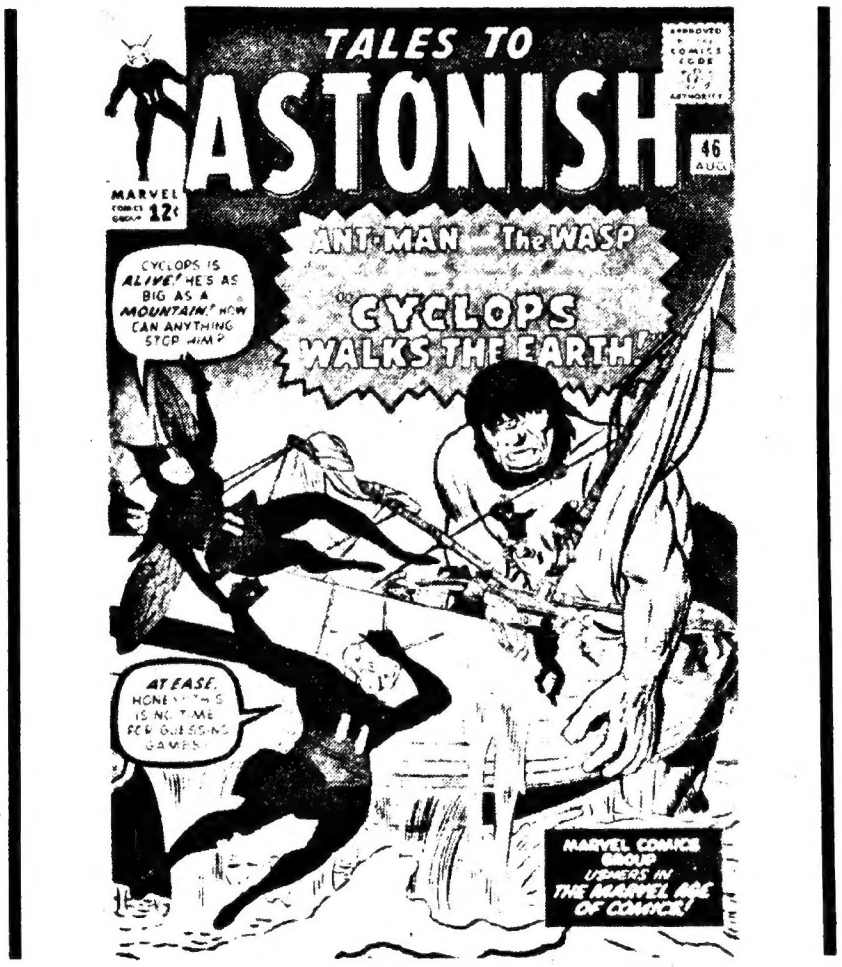
- but when he wanted me to read him the latest DAREDEVIL, I found myself coming up with excuses to go on to something else instead!

In fact, outside of the DC Digests, anything newer than about 1968 would cause me to think twice before letting him do more than look at the covers! DAREDEVIL, MOONKNIGHT, even the more innocuous DC heroes, were beyond my inexperienced-with-children capabilities to explain to him without "grossing him out". His sisters make a habit of pulling out my Frazetta and Vallejo art books, turning to an illo of a near-naked female and declaring it to be "Dis-gus'-ting!", while simultaneously enjoying my videotape of Flash Gordon (1980) movie because, as one of them explained to me, "It's kinky.". On the one hand, it seemed to me there should be super-hero comics other than the Weisinger Supermans and Schwartz Flashes that I could safely read to these prospective new comics fans (after all, I have a collection of nearly 11,000 of the things - surely there must be something!); on the other hand, if they are already possessed of a certain obvious degree of pseudo-maturity beyond which I myself was possessed at the same age, maybe it was okay to let them look at whatever caught their eyes. (The same type of dilemma arose with kung fu pictures, incidentally. Reruns of the Kung Fu TV series bore my nephew stiff - too much talk and not enough action, but I was hesitant to let him see "all" of Enter the Dragon because of the extreme violence.)

The final awakening came to me when an even younger visiting child of a neighbor's relatives saw the Dr. Strange poster on my wall and proceeded to explain how he had read of Doc's battles with Baron Mordo (whether a Ditko reprint or the recent Marshall Rogers issues, I'm not sure). Why, I asked myself while pounding my head to make sure I had heard him right, are four-year-olds reading DR. STRANGE??? I answered myself: "because there's nothing else, dummy!". You were reading Donald Duck at that age; try to find Donald Duck comics outside of the poorly-distributed Whitman supermarket bags today.

Thus it occurred to me that there is precious little in the way of readily-available comics for children to read other than the same ones I myself read and they are, by my own admission, mature in the extreme as comics go. Television gets around this problem by constantly rerunning the sit-coms of my childhood and adolescence from after-school till early evening, thus giving the kids something to watch besides **Dallas** and **Hill Street Blues** (both good shows for the correct audience, but that audience is not meant to be composed of children). But comics as a whole seem to have decided that there is no market for anything less adult than say, the early Marvels written by Stan Lee. Over the years, this has become a self-fulfilling prophecy: since there are no new funny-animal or funny-human comics (or western, or romance, or half-a-dozen other formerly-popular genres of comics), no one expects to see any and no one evidences a taste for same; ergo, there is no market for this fare.

So, although I don't yet know quite what to do about it, I have been awakened to the fact that comics have deserted the varied diet they provided when I was younger, and that this is a cause for concern. If there is nothing else to read, today's younger set is faced with a choice between reading the same comics as older comics fans (thus, Jerry Bails must ponder the brutal circumstances in the origins of most of the New Teen Titans before giving the books to his ten-year-old son; Cat Yronwode must consider whether the latest **X-Men** will frighten her 11-year-old daughter; and I must search out some innocuous early **DDs** for my five-year-old nephew), or reading no comics at all (and where will the next generation of comics fans come from then?). The alternatives then would seem to be license or illiteracy, barring any change in the publishing practices of the major companies. I was as four-square against cen-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sorship in any form as the next liberal, but ... censorship for WHOM? Like it or not, this is ostensibly a children's medium we're dealing with in comic books and while children absolutely do not require the brand of censorship that has turned Saturday morning TV into a wasteland for the last decade-plus, neither can they be turned loose with no guidelines at all.

Some of my observations and conclusions may seem overly obvious to some readers, but it occurs to me why I was so late in my realization of this particular problem. The censors would have us believe that children are a sort of mindless, amorphous community-intelligence - one size fits all. As should be obvious to any parent, this is just not so! In fact, children tend to be as different from one another, and many times more so, than the adults they will become. I failed to recognize the need for any censorship guidelines for children simply because as a child, I was [with some parental prodding so inobvious that I cannot now recall a single instance of being "forbidden" to see or read "anything"] my own censor! Unlike Bill Cosby, some of whose most famous routines are based on his and his friends's childhood desires to go to monster movies and listen to radio shows in order to be "scared to death", I loathed being scared to death and wasn't particularly thrilled with being compelled to lose my lunch either. Hence, I steered clear of anything, be it movies, TV, comics, books or what-have-you that might upset my tender grade-school-age psyche. I sampled the wares of those comics publishers, whose product I didn't normally buy, in friends' collections and found them not to my liking; at the same time I became aware of the alternative products so that I could try them again in a few years when my tastes had changed.

The difference between myself as a child and today's kids, and between the 50's and the 80's, is largely one of guidelines: it's become impossible for anyone short of a comics scholar to tell what's palatable without reading everything first before the kids see it. The idea of a ratings system somewhat akin to the movies's seems like a good idea. To the average parent, Star Wars and Alien are merely two science fiction movies, yet one got a Restricted rating and the other did not. Would it be too much to ask that Warren's **1994** sport an X-rating, while **DD, X-Men, Teen Titans** and the Marvel Direct Sales titles [at least on certain issues] carry an R or at least a PG, and **Superman, Spider-Man** and **Star Wars** be marked suitable for children in some fashion? We've had designated "little kids" comics when **Spidey Super Stories** and [to a lesser extent] **Super Friends** were being published; why not "Big kids" comics and "bigger kids" comics?

What's that, Chris, Marv, Len, et al? You don't want **X-Men** and **Teen Titans** to be rated unsuitable for children? You want children to be able to read your comics? Then it behooves you to produce them with children in mind. The creators in question are my contemporaries in age; could it be that they too have forgotten what it was like to be a child and need to be reminded as I was? [Hey, some of you people have children of your own; you needn't be as stupid as us single folk.]

As I said at the beginning of this piece: for myself, I had done little thinking on the matter of censorship in comics. What surprised me, however, was that no one else had done any skullwork on the matter either, including the top professionals in the comics industry.

Herewith, an example: Ever since the advent of Direct Sales Only titles last year [notably, Marvel's **Micronauts, Ka-Zar and Moon Knight**], there has been much ado made about the fact that these books not only lack the every-other-page advertising of the newsstand comics, but that they do not carry the Comics Code Seal. Several times, in fanzines and letters pages, people have written to ask, however peripherally, why this is so, only to be put off with a "for reasons too hard to explain/go into here" and praise for the return of Code-less comics after nearly thirty years. Recently, at a major comics convention, I put the question to a panel of professionals who were collaborating on yet more Direct Sales titles, namely the planned line of Epic Comics from Marvel. Speaking bluntly, I was metaphorically patted on the head and told not to worry about it.

"But guys," I insisted, "if you go on putting out comics with no Code Seal even if they contain no material that wouldn't have seen print in a Code approved newsstand comic, you're just asking for it! You're leading with your chins! In case you're unaware of it, Freddy Wertham is not dead; he's been reincarnated as Jerry Falwell of the so-called Moral Majority, and sooner or later he's gonna look down from the clouds and notice comics and when he does, what you're doing now will help him put you out of business!" "Nonsense", they told me. "Not to worry." "It'll never happen." "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it." Only Dean Mullaney of Eclipse seemed concerned when I reiterated these sentiments to him privately later, and that mostly because he had just experienced some negative feedback to the first issue of **Sabre** which, though they had found nothing wrong with the exact same story in book form four years previous, some of his customers now objected to because "it looks like a comic and we didn't expect to find this kind of stuff [sex and nudity] in a comic".

Strangely enough, on a panel at the previous year's convention featuring Dick Giordano, Denny O'Neil and Roy Thomas, among others, the participants seemed acutely aware of the Moral Majority and expressed the opinion that "we're just small potatoes to him [Falwell]. He's after movies and TV networks and he's winning. If he ever notices us, he could close us down in one day without breathing hard." Now, I do not believe that Jerry Falwell will ever personally go into a Direct Sales comic book store, and thus he may never see the offending Code-less books [which I should mention, don't contain anything as graphic as **Sabre** or **1994** and are in as good or better taste than many Code-approved titles] but the man has millions of followers so why take chances? I am not advocating that we run scared before the fact as.the TV networks are doing but on the other hand, a little common sense never hurt anyone. Being afraid to cross the street is silly and foolish; ignoring a traffic light is criminal negligence and downright dangerous.

I came away from that convention not only still not understanding why the comics industry is seemingly witlessly bent upon its own destruction, and engaged in a conspiracy to "feed the hand that may bite it", as it were, but I still

don't have an answer to my first question, namely "Why are Direct Sales comics not required to subscribe to the Comics Code?" The only reason I can see is that someone, somewhere, thinks that the little kids, for whose protection this censor exists after all, never venture into comic book shops, but buy all their comics on the newsstands, i.e., they do not buy **Micronauts, Moon Knight** or **Ka-Zar** anymore nor will they buy **Camelot 3000** or the other upcoming DC Direct Sales books when they appear.

'Tain't so, guys! Both of my local comics stores, two of the largest in Canada and for that matter in North America, are overrun with "little kids" every day of the week and they buy as many Direct Sales items as I do, which is all of them. I can perhaps understand [if not agree with] the reasoning that says these books do not have to go through the Code, but what the heck, as long as they contain nothing objectionable anyway, why not put them through regardless, just so that we can protect ourselves from another witchhunt?

This has been a rather disjointed column, I must admit, but censorship and lack of same is a rather disjointed subject on which I find myself of more than one mind. As always, comments [especially from the professionals concerned!] are welcomed by: Murray R. Ward, in care of this magazine.

"Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!"

—Monty Python, 1969 -

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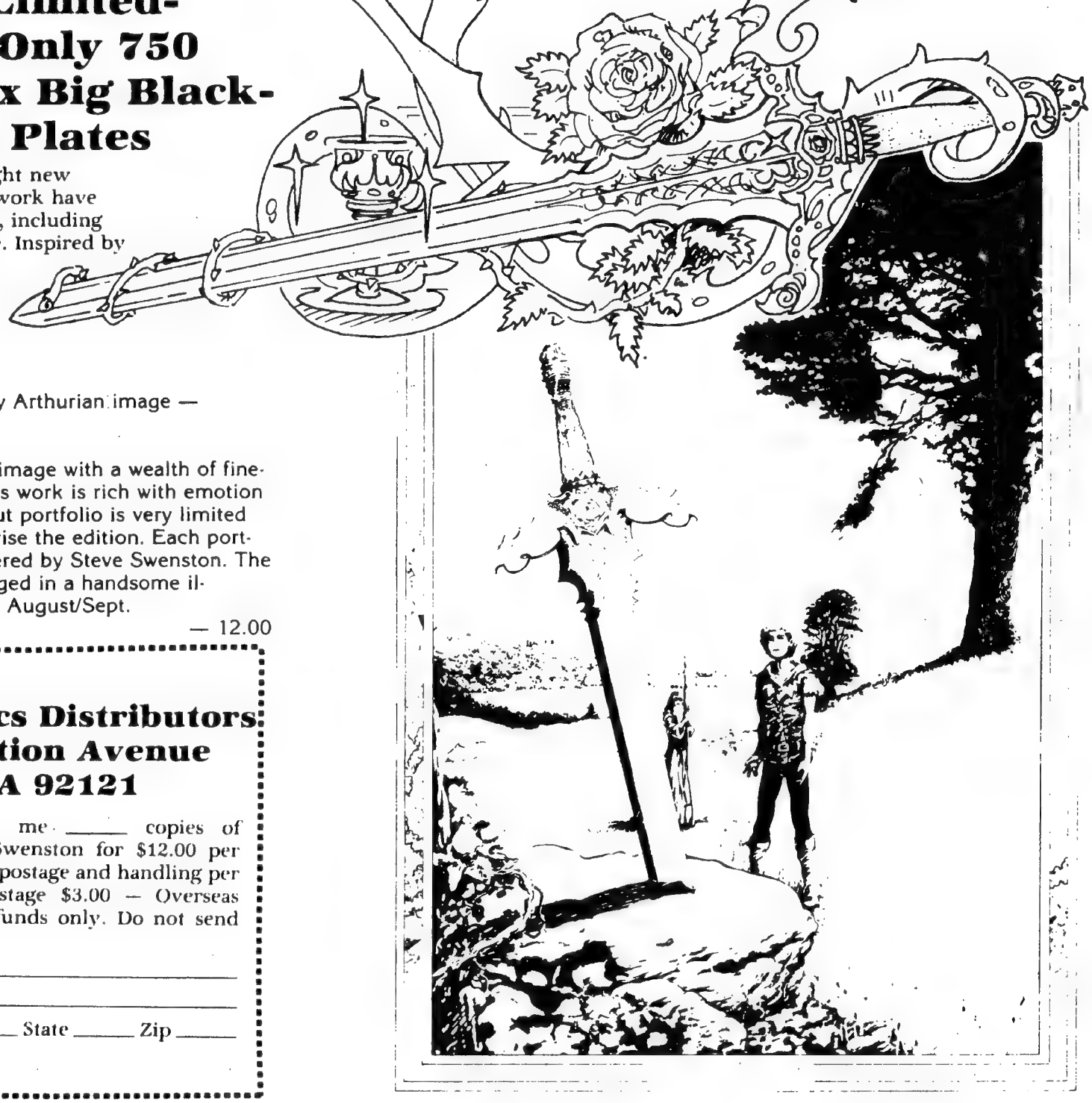

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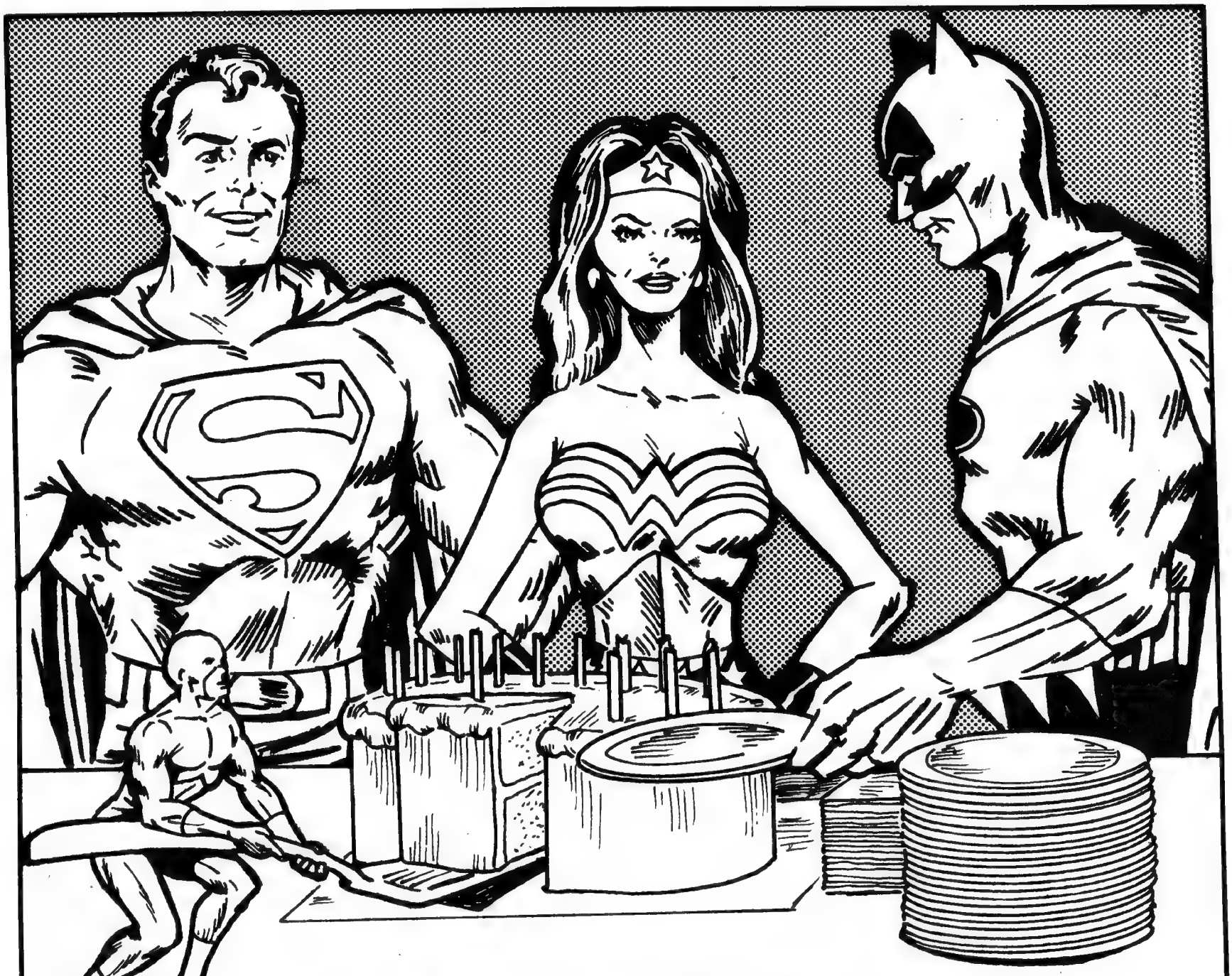

A DC BIRTHDAY INDEX

BY Rich Morrissey

[In preparing this Index, I have unhesitatingly followed the lead of Chuck Huber and Doug Highsmith's similar one for the Marvel characters. I have followed his practice of listing all characters who have either had their own features or been members of major teams, at least since the beginning of the "Silver Age" in 1956. The same criteria apply to earlier heroes, but I have taken the liberty of omitting minor characters such as The Ship, the Ghost Patrol and Mr. America who have neither appeared nor been mentioned since the beginning of the Silver Age. Characters published by other companies, particularly Quality and Fawcett, to which DC later acquired the rights, are included only if they have appeared in original DC stories; hence Plastic Man, the Phantom Lady and Captain Marvel are included but characters such as Captain Midnight, Radar, The Clock and Captain Triumph are not.

Because of the frequent duplication of names, the several universes in the DC continuum, and the presence of some characters [e.g., Tarzan, Warlord, Arak] whose adventures take place in none of the regular universes, I've adopted certain conventions of nomenclature. An Arabic number [1 or 2] following a hero's name indicates that that hero lives on Earth-1 or Earth-2 respectively, even though in most cases the Earth-Two version appeared first: thus Barry Allen is Flash 1 and Jay Garrick is Flash 2. Heroes who may have existed on both Earths but whose adventures have not [yet] been differentiated enough to be distinguishable, such as Vigilante, are listed only once. When two or more characters share a name but are on the same Earth or a world outside the universe of Earth-1 or Earth-2, they have been distinguished by Roman numerals: Starfire I is the Russian hero Leonid Kovar, Starfire II is a heroine of a post-atomic world, and Starfire III is Princess Koriand'r of the New Teen Titans. [The Supergirl villainess by the same name, never having belonged to a major group or having had her own feature, is not included.]

As with the Marvel index, these dates are sometimes arbitrary and generally chosen to be as late as possible, judging by a character's appearance and past accomplishments as of his or her first appearance. Further notes appear after the listing. Starred characters have been specifically dated in the comics themselves.

Indeterminate, but Extremely Old: Shazam, the Source, the Guardians of the Universe

Indeterminate, but Moderately Old: The Phantom Stranger, Immortal Man

Indeterminate due to Alien Lifespans: The Forever People, Mister Miracle, the New Gods, Mr. Mxyzptlk, J'Onn J'Onzz [the Martian Manhunter], Etrigan [The Demon], Starman [II and III(1) , Starfire II, Claw the Unconquered, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, Rac Shade [The Changing Man], Masters of the Universe, Captain Carrot and Zoo Crew, Captain Marvel Bunny, the Fox and the Crow, etc.

Indeterminate because Nobody Cares: Brother Power the Geek, B'wana Beast, Prez, the Green Team, the Outsiders, Code Name: Assassin, the Inferior Five, Tracey Thompson, the Dingbats, Bomba [Simba] the Jungle Boy, Plastic Man Jr. [from the 1966 run], The Enchantress, Ultra the Multi-Alien, I...Vampire, the Creature Commandos, Mister E, the Atomic Knights, Hercules [Unbound], Scooter, Binky, Buzzy, etc.

Prehistory: Anthro, Tor, Kong, Gnarrk

Atlantean Age: Arion

Ancient Egypt: Ibis the Invincible

Classical Era: Atlas, the Amazons, Wonder Woman [1 & 2]

Arthurian Age: King Arthur, Sir Justin [The Shining Knight], Brian Kent [The Silent Knight]

8th Century: Arak, Son of Thunder

c. 11th Century: Jon [the Viking Prince]

Before 16th Century: Ras al Ghul

17th Century: The Black Pirate

18th Century: Tomahawk and Rangers, Miss Liberty

Before 1818: Frankenstein's monster

1838: Jonah Hex

1830's-1850's: Johnny Thunder [II], Nighthawk, Matt Savage, Brian Savage [Scalphunter], Bat Lash, Firehair, Lazarus Lane [El Diablo], Cinnamon, Outlaw, Billy the Kid, Super-Chief et al, Alex Olsen [Swamp Thing I [2?]]

1888: John Clayton [Tarzan]

1890's: Kent Allard [the Shadow], [Sgt.] Frank Rock

1900: Mathilda Hunkel [Red Tornado 2], Hendrickson

1908: Kent Nelson [Dr. Fate]*

1910: Charles McNider [Dr. Mid-Nite], Richard Grey [the Black Condor]

1913: Lee Travis [The Crimson Avenger]

1914: Carter Hall [Hawkman 2], Darrel Dane [Doll Man], Wesley Dodds [Sandman 2]

1915: Bruce Wayne [Batman 2], Rex Tyler [Hourman], Lois Lane [2], Jim Barr [Bulletman]

1916: Kal-L [Superman 2], Kara Zor-L [Power Girl], Jim Corrigan [The Spectre], Martha Roberts [Doll Girl], Susan Kent [Bulletgirl], Oliver Queen [Green Arrow 2]

1917: Johnny Thunder [I/2]*, Shierra Sanders [Hawkgirl 2], Larry Jordan [Air Wave I], Paul Kirk [Manhunter I], Alan Armstrong [Spy Smasher]

1918: Alan Scott [Green Lantern 2], Gred Sanders [Vigilante], Ted Knight [Starman I/2], Happy Terril [The Ray], Zatara the Magician, Aquaman I [2?]

1919: Robert Crane [Robotman 2], Stanislaus, Rod Reilly [Firebrand I], John Sargent [Sargon the Sorcerror], Libby Lawrence [Liberty Belle], Hank Heywood [Steel the Indestructible Man], Congo Bill [Congorilla]

1920: Jay Garrick [Flash 2], Lar Gand [Mon-El], Johnny Chambers [Johnny Quick], Roy Lincoln [The Human Bomb], Danette Reilly [Firebrand II]

1921: Eel O'Brian [Plastic Man Sr.], Andre, Ted Grant [Wildcat], Jim Harper [The Guardian], Sandra Knight [Phantom Lady]

1922: Al Pratt [Atom 2], Blackhawk, Terry Sloane [Mr. Terrific], Jack Weston [Minute Man]

1923: Niles Caulder [The Chief], Chuck

1924: Olaf

1925: Travis Morgan [Warlord]*, Chop-Chop

1926: Terrence Thirteen [the Ghost-Breaker], Sylvester Pemberton [Star-Spangled Kid]*

1927: Scribbly Jibbet [I/2]

1928: Clive Arno [Captain Action]

1930: Adam Blake [Captain Comet]

1931: Dinah Drake [Black Canary], Prof Haley, Mark Merlin [Prince Ra-Man]

1932: Dick Grayson [Robin 2], Billy Batson [Captain Marvel], Mary Batson [Mary Marvel], Freddy Freeman [Captain Marvel Jr.], Roy Harper [Speedy 2], Boston Brand [Deadman]

1933: Lex Luthor [1], Larry Trainor [Negative Man], Tommy Rogers [Little Boy Blue], Hal Jordan [Green Lantern 1], Scribbly Jibbet II [1?], Ace Morgan, Christopher Freeman [Kid Eternity]

1934: Katar Hol [Hawkman 1]*, Adam Strange, Sisty Hunkel [Cyclone Kid A]

1935: Bruce Wayne [Batman 1], Barry Allen [Flash 1], Rocky Davis, Dinky Jibbet [Cyclone Kid B]

1936: Kal-El [Superman 1], Oliver Queen [Green Arrow 1], Red Ryan

1937: Lois Lane [1], Shayera Thal [Hawkgirl/Hawkwoman 1]

1938: Krypto the Superdog, Kathy Kane [Batwoman], Arthur Curry [Aquaman II]

1939: Cliff Steele [Robotman 1], Rita Farr [Elasti-Girl]

1940: Ray Palmer [Atom 1]*, Ralph Dibny [Elongated Man], Bruce Gordon [Eclipso]

1941: Jimmy Olsen [1], Buddy Baker [Animal Man]

1942: Jack Ryder [The Creeper]

1943: Barbara Gordon [Batgirl II], Rex Mason [Metamorpho]

1944: Kara Zor-El [Supergirl]*

1945: Martin Stein [Firestorm B]

1946: Jim Rook [Nightmaster]

1947: Alec Holland [Swamp Thing II/1]

1948: Andrea Thomas [Isis], Jefferson Pierce [Black Lightning]*

1949: Rose Forrest [The Thorn], Zatanna Zatara

1950: Mark Shaw [Manhunter II/Privateer/Star-Tsar]

1951: Dick Grayson [Robin 1], Wally West [Kid Flash], Roy Harper [Speedy 1], Betty Kane [Bat-Girl I]

1952: Carl Arno [Action Boy], Aqualad, Donna Troy [Wonder Girl]

1953: Robby Reed [Dial H for Hero I], Hand Hall [The Hawk], Lilith Clay

1954: Don Hall [The Dove], Mal Duncan

1955: Leonid Kovar [Starfire I], Mari McCabe [The Vixen]

1956: Garfield Craig Logan [Beast Boy/The Changeling]

1957: Helena Wayne [The Huntress]*, Bizarro #1

1958: Karen Beecher [The Bumblebee]

1959: Duela Dent [The Joker's Daughter/The Harlequin]

1962: The Metal Men*, Victor Stone [Cyborg], Raven

1963: Princess Koriand'r [Starfire III], Ronnie Raymond [Firestorm A]

1964: Hal Jordan [Air Wave II]

1966: Vicki Grant and Chris King [Dial H for Hero II]

1967: Buddy Blank [OMAC]

1968: Red Tornado 1 [John Smith]

1970: The Golden Guardian*

21st Century: The Space Ranger, Superman 2020, Tommy Tomorrow, the Star Hunters

25th Century: The Knights of the Galaxy, Klar Ken T5477 [Superman VII]

30th Century: Legion of Super-Heroes, Kamandi

General Observations: After the historical [especially Western] heroes born before 1900, the first wave of heroes was around the beginning of World War II. Their birthdates are clustered around the late teens and early twenties with some of the teenagers and children [the Cyclone Kids may have been as young as 6 and 5 when they began, but in general I've assumed them to be no younger than 8 when they commenced their careers] in the late twenties and early thirties. The only heroes I've been able to find specific birth years for, among the Justice Society and its contemporaries, are Dr. Fate and Johnny Thunder. I've assumed that most of the others were in their early twenties when they began with the exceptions of Dr. Mid-Nite and the Black Condor [whose professions of physician and U.S. Senator respectively would seem to make them both at least thirty], the clearly middle-aged "Ma" Hunkel and Sgt. Rock and the well-documented [if mostly outside the scope of the comics] Shadow. On the other hand, the Atom and the Flash, both of whom were still in college when they started out, are presumably somewhat younger than the others. I've generally followed the research of previous commentators for the birth years of various heroes such as Michael Fleisher for Batman, E. Nelson Bridwell for Superman and Paul Levitz for most of the JSA members - but I haven't been above correcting some of the obvious errors [such as Levitz' once giving the Earth-2 Robin's birth year as 1942, which would have had him fighting crime two years before he was born!]

With the non-super teams like the Blackhawks and the Challengers, I've again assumed them to have been largely in their early twenties [or in the case of the Blackhawks, their late teens] when they began. Hendrickson is clearly the oldest of the Blackhawks, probably followed by Stanislaus and second-in-command Andre. On the other hand, Chuck and Chop-Chop, the two last

members to join, are probably among the youngest; Olaf was once stated to be the youngest Blackhawk, but the early stories make it much more likely that he was second-youngest.

By the 1930's, the second generation of DC heroes - the Justice League and other heroes of the sixties - are beginning to be born. I've chosen dates that seem reasonable in the case of characters like Superman, Batman and Green Arrow, even though it's often difficult to find any exact switch from Earth-2 to Earth-1. Even the very existence of an Earth-2 Aquaman is in question, but since the current character is clearly a relative contemporary of the rest of the JLA (aside from the significantly older Phantom Stranger, Wonder Woman and Black Canary and the significantly younger Zatanna and Firestorm) and has a different origin from the Golden Age character, I've assumed the existence of two versions even though DC has never officially established this. Similarly, I've conjectured that the Scribbly who had his own magazine from 1948 (when he was 15) through 1950, was on Earth-1, since the earlier version, in whose strip the original Red Tornado appeared, was on Earth-2. Conversely, we know the current Swamp Thing, Alec Holland, is on Earth-1, so most likely Alex Olsen (of the original **House of Secrets** story) was a native of Earth-2. But all this is speculation; it's entirely possible that none of these characters exists on any of the established Earths.

Most of the later characters are self-explanatory: we know a few ages from specific reference. Supergirl was 15 in 1959, Jimmy Olsen's 21st birthday was in 1962, and Ray Palmer said he was 28 in 1968 (which would make him 21 when he began his career - and indeed, his situation in the early stories, in which he did little but research and rarely if ever taught classes, did seem to indicate he was a graduate student who was still working toward the Ph.D. he finally earned). Bizarro #1's first appearance wasn't until 1959, but since he had a son in 1961, who was surely no younger than 4, I've pushed his birthday back to the year when (again according to E. Nelson Bridwell) Clark Kent first began to work at the **Daily Planet.** The confused chronology of the Harlequin may be partially explained by the fact that we don't really know much detail about the early career of Earth-1's Two-Face, Harvey Dent (only about his Earth-2 counterpart, Harvey Kent), but a 1959 birthdate does make Batman and Robin just old enough to have met Two-Face slightly before her birth.

As for the heroes of the future, once again most of their dates and approximate ages have been given. Yet two of them have already been born: Mon-El was already 18 years old when Krypton exploded (in 1938 in the Earth-1 universe) but then spent over a decade in suspended animation and will spend over a millennium in the Phantom Zone. And if we accept the date of 1986, once given for the OMAC stories, Buddy Blank (who was about 19) was born in 1967. Interestingly enough, an alternate ending to his final adventure in his own magazine was drawn by creator Jack Kirby and still exists in DC's files, and may yet be published one day. It may well have been at this moment that a critical decision was/will be made, as Paul Levitz has written in **The Amazing World of DC Comics**, that gave rise to the two best-chronicled possible futures of Earth-1. The original Kirby conclusion had the "World that's Coming" continuing on its high-tech course, leading ultimately to the future of the Legion of Super-Heroes - but the Jim Starlin conclusion that's been published had things altered by the still-unexplained Great Disaster, carrying OMAC on to an alternate destiny that will culminate in his becoming Kamandi's grandfather.

This relationship, confirmed not only in the Levitz article but in the **Kamandi** book itself, would seem to contradict the statement in a later issue that Kamandi himself lives in the 30th century. However, the extent of the ruin and the immense strides in evolution, social as well as physical, made by the animals in Kamandi's world would seem to bear the figure out, so I've chosen to accept it. Very likely, Buddy Blank decided to put himself and his grandson into suspended animation for over 900 years, in the hopes that he would discover a better world than OMAC's own.

Any criticism of, or additions to this article are welcome.

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DAVID
FRANSUE
'79

J. Millington '82

J. Millington "82"

J. Millington "82"

WDonahue
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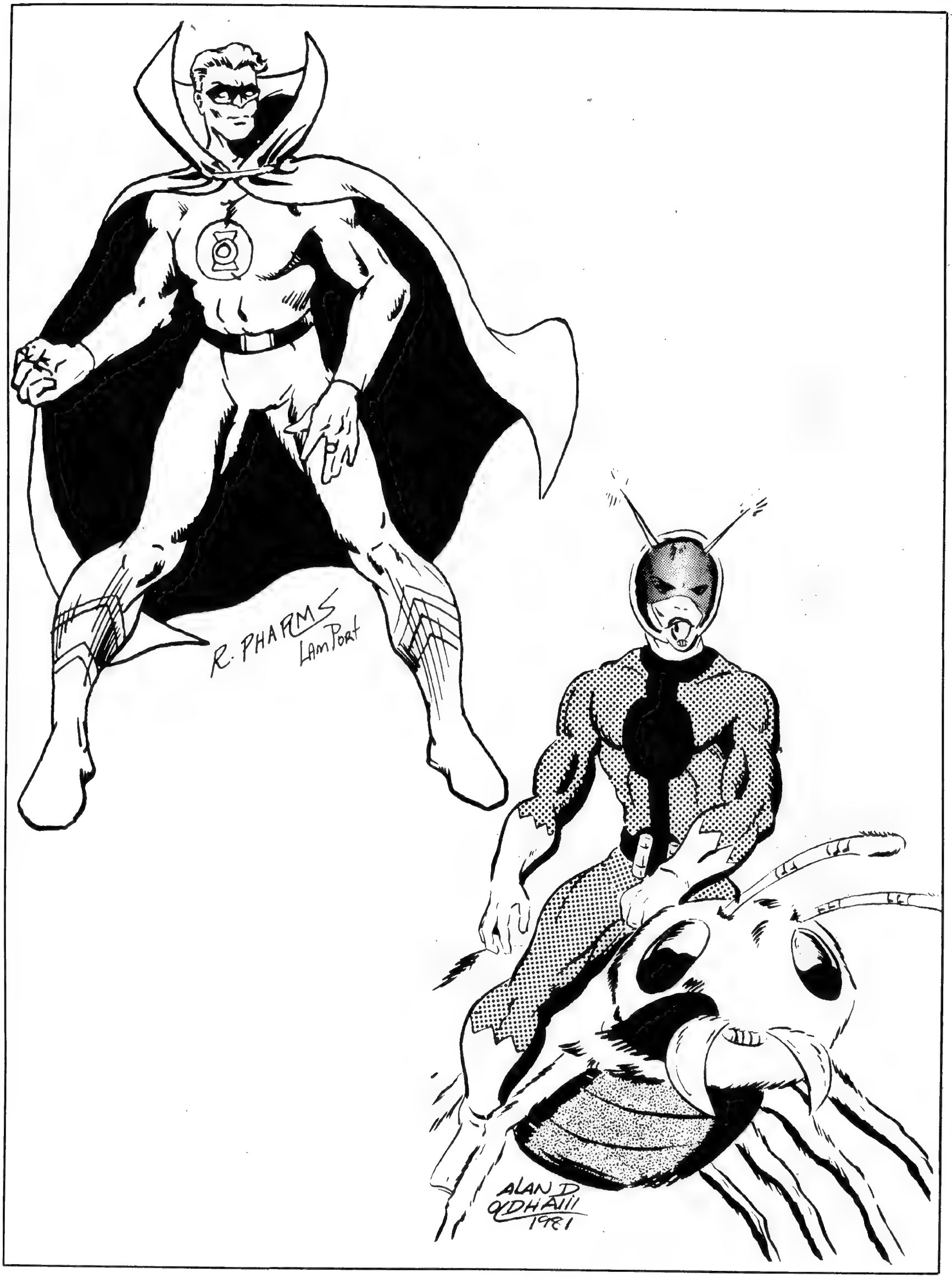
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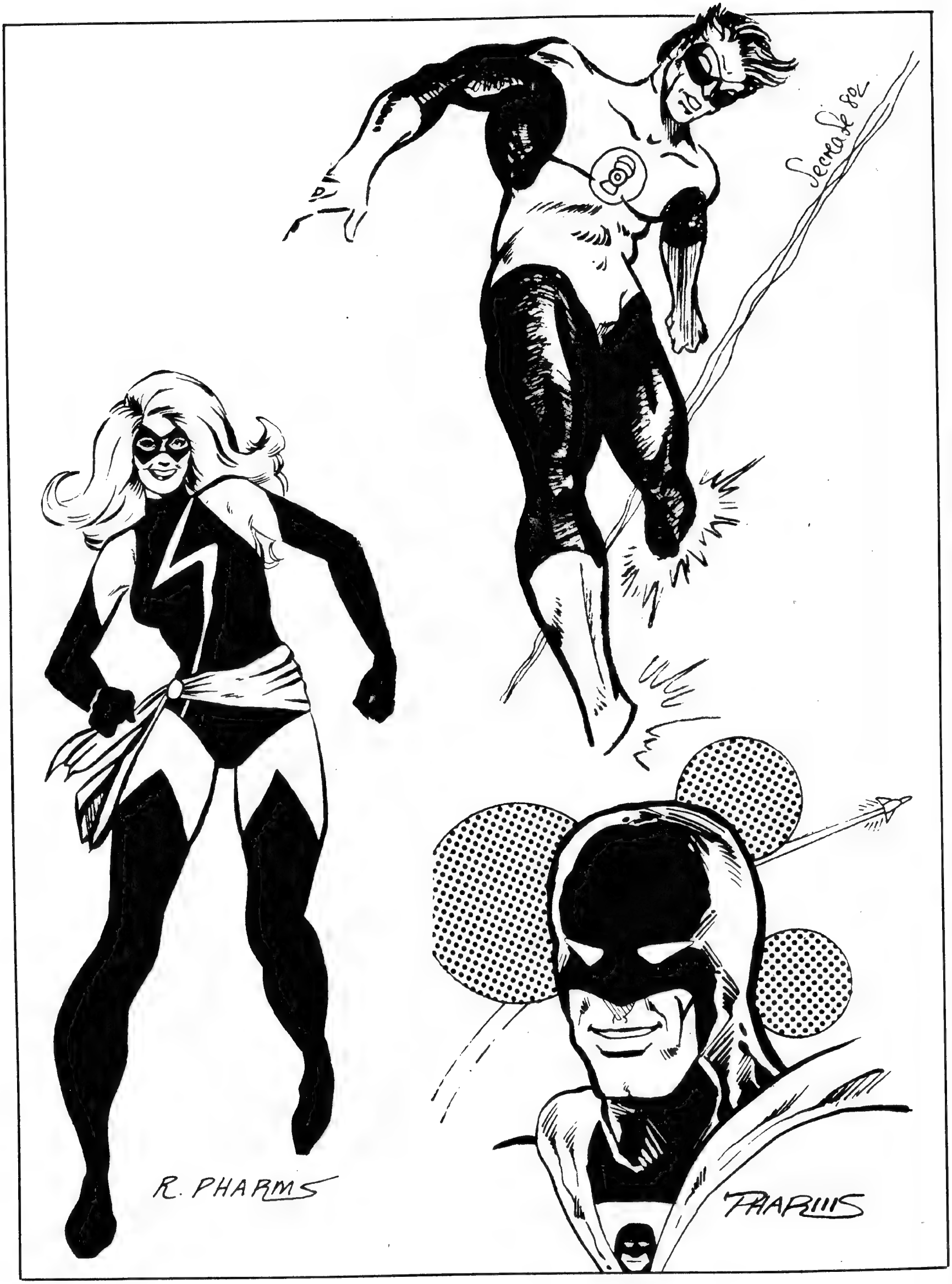
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LAMPORT '79

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COMIC BOOKS AND THE BANALITY OF EVIL:

OH-HO, BOY! THIS IS GREAT!
ENJOYIN' YOURSELVES, DARLIN'S? MIZ AMANDA? MIZ COLLEEN? MIZ BETSY? I SURELY HOPE SO-- 'CAUSE I'M HAVING THE TIME O' MY LIFE!
I SEE, BEFORE MY BRAINWASHIN WEARS OFF, I FIGURE COLOSSUS WILL KILL THE X-MEN, OR THEY'LL BE FORCED TO KILL HIM. EITHER WAY, THEY LOSE--
--AND ARCADE WINS!

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DENATURED VILLAINY AND UNHEROIC HEROES

by Margaret O'Connell

According to the conventional stereotype, frequently invoked by supercilious film and TV critics whose ultimate insult to a simple-minded show is a sneering reference to its alleged "comic book mentality," comic books are characterized by a simplistically black-and-white moral schema in which good guys are good through and through, bad guys are irredeemably evil, and justice always triumphs in no uncertain terms. A careful reading of the Comics Code would largely confirm this impression, not to mention confirm whatever preconceived notions one might have about the prudish and fussily old-fashioned nature of the official comic book definition of goodness. The General Standards of the Code require that:

> Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals...
>
> If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.
>
> Criminals shall not be presented in glamorous circumstances, unless an unhappy end results from their ill-gotten gains, and creates no desire for emulation.
>
> In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal [be] punished for his misdeeds.
>
> Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published [sic] only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be

Margaret O'Connell is a student in Comparitive Literature at Princeton Graduate School.

"Sometimes the most one-dimensionally undidactic stories can be the most insidious..."

LET ME GO! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO!
GIVE YOU THE FATE YOU DESERVE, YOU TORTURING DEVIL!
THE TORTURER VANISHES FROM VIEW BEHIND A GROVE OF DISTANT TREES WITH A PITIFUL WAIL --
©1981 DC Comics

presented alluringly nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.[1]

More specifically, the Code prohibits the presentation of "illicit" (nonmarital) sexual relationships and the portrayal of divorce in any but the most unfavorable light.[2] The Code further states that "Nudity in any form is prohibited. Suggestive and salacious illustration is unacceptable." In an especially ironic provision, which would put the good girl art cult out of business in a flash if enforced, the Comics Code stipulates that "Females shall be drawn realistically without undue emphasis on any physical quality."

It will be obvious to the most unobservant reader that much of the above catalogue of prohibitions is more often honored in the breach than the observance. This is undoubtedly just as well, since the Comics Code Authority's idea of providing proper moral guidance for youngsters seems to consist of eliminating entirely even the most censorious portrayals of those activities it considers particularly beyond the pale, such as drug abuse, in the vain hope that this will prevent the readers from discovering their existence. According to the CCA's view, which conforms more closely to the simplistic stereotype of "comic book morality" than most actual comic books do, acknowledging on panel that some people take angel dust is tantamount to encouraging readers to follow their example, and giving Dracula's saintly wife a name which means "belonging to God" amounts to mere blasphemy, rather than an attempt to make a morally unexceptional artistic point through symbolism. Under these circumstances, it is probably fortunate that the CCA usually carries out its duties so inattentively that one often has the impression that they read scripts submitted for inspection with both eyes tight shut. The Comics Code Authority's ridiculous overreactions on the rare occasions when they do notice something morally dubious—an event which seems to occur only in regard to material impinging on their abovementioned twin bugaboos, drug abuse and (alleged) blasphemy—demostrate conclusively that even when the industry appoints its own censors, creativity is in more danger of being stifled than immorality.

However, the fact that censorship solves nothing does not imply that comics creators have no responsibility to consider how their work may affect the more impressionable readers' sense of right and wrong. If ignoring the existence of potentially offensive issues is not the answer, neither is ignoring the fact that younger readers especially do tend to pick up the underlying concepts of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior that are implicit even in stories intended as "mere entertainment," totally devoid of all uplifting or mind-expanding messages.

Sometimes the most one-dimensionally undidactic stories can be the most insidious in this regard. Early Siegel and Shuster Superman stories like the one reprinted in DC's Collecter's edition facsimile of *SUPERMAN #1*, in which Superman stops a war in Latin America by threatening to kill the dictators of the two countries involved if they don't make peace, teach readers that as long as you're an officially-designated good guy, the end justifies the means. Silver Age Superman "hoax" stories teach that it's all right to play all kinds of dirty tricks on your friends and the woman you supposedly love as long as you have even a flimsy excuse for claiming it's for their own good. Stories like the 1964 "Once a Green Lantern—Always a Green Lantern," which introduced the female Green Lantern Katma Tui, teach that a woman's place is basically in the home, and that those rare women who are impelled to have careers must sacrifice all the "normal" satisfactions of home and family life as the

"... it is probably fortunate that the CCA usually carries out its duties so inattentively that one often has the impression that they read scripts submitted for inspection with both eyes tight shut."

THEY ARE ALL AWAKE, ARCADE.
THANK YOU, MISS LOCKE. SYSTEMS UP DATE, MISTER CHAMBERS?
ALL READINGS NOMINAL. YOU CAN START WHENEVER YOU'RE READY.
MY FRIEND, THAT'S JUST WHAT I WANTED TO HEAR.

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price of their "unfeminine" ambition.

More recent examples are even more alarming. The inclusion of Wolverine in the New X-Men, and especially his teammates' tolerance of his unnecessary slashing to death (or near-death, according to the belated follow-up scripter Chris Claremont has been ordered to insert in an upcoming issue of *X-MEN*) of an ordinary guard whom the New X-Men could easily have simply rendered unconscious (*X-MEN #116*), teaches that it's okay to be a psychotic killer as long as you only kill people who are your enemies, if only in the most technical sense. Moondragon's brainwashing of Quicksilver in *AVENGERS #176* in order to purge him of his bigoted attitudes toward androids, especially the android married to his sister, once again teaches the old lesson that for good guys, and/or the politically correct, the end justifies the means, even a means which in this case amounts to a cross between psychic rape and psychic lobotomy. And these are only examples of what the too-receptive reader can learn from the behavior of heroes, who presumably are basically good people functioning on some level as role models of how guys should behave.

The increasing prominence of super-anti-heroes whose own conduct does not bear close examination, and of show-stopping villains whose flashy antics are presented so sympathetically that many readers develop more of an emotional investment in the villain than in the heroes they are supposed to be rooting for, tends to blur the distinction between good and evil to the point where the designations "hero" and "villain," "good guy" and "bad guy," come to seem merely arbitrary, less a matter of good and evil than of conforming to or defying an abstract law and order which amounts to nothing more compelling than convention. When the "good guys" include blood-thirsty psychotics like Wolverine, and the "bad guy" is someone like Arcade, the engagingly mad pinball wizard-*cum*-assassin-for-hire whom most readers unreservedly love (rather than loving to hate, as is the case with more traditional popular villains like the Joker or Dr. Doom), the battle between heroes and villain inevitably forfeits its traditional symbolic overtones of nurturing, life-preserving Goodness vs. cruelly destructive Evil and takes on the aura of mere ritual combat.

In stories like the two-part Arcade adventure in *X-MEN #123-124*, the heroes are labeled good, but some of them, at least, are not conspicuously morally superior to Arcade, who, as the officially-designated villain, is labeled bad. Arcade, on the other hand, is presented as such a charming, fun-loving fellow that it is hard to take his murderous acts and intentions seriously as evidence of evil, especially since, although we are told he is a highly respected assassin, he has never actually succeeded in killing anyone on panel in his previous career. This impression is further reinforced by the fact that Arcade seems so unconcerned about his failure to kill the X-Men that it is difficult for the reader to believe that he really meant any harm in the first place.

"In the X-MEN tale, on the other hand, Claremont neglects to supply any such introductory moral framing device, and even omits to give any of the 'good' characters a chance to make any coherent comments on Arcade's obvious criminal insanity until the beginning of the second part of the story."

Interestingly, this is not the case in Arcade's first appearance, in *MARVEL TEAM-UP #65-66*. In vivid contrast to the X-Men story, whose feverishly hectic pace, barrage of death traps too zany to pose credible threats, and use of Arcade as a virtual viewpoint character actively discourage the reader from pausing long enough to realize that the potentially deadly pinball game is not just mildly kinky good fun, the *MARVEL TEAM-UP* story has both a basically sound moral framework and heroes (Spider-Man and Captain Britain) who provide a strong moral and dramatic counterpoint to the villain.

Perhaps the most striking difference between *MARVEL TEAM-UP #65-66* and *X-MEN #123-124* is that in the former, the moral opprobriousness of assassination and its practitioners, even the dashingly stylish ones, is established before Arcade even goes into action. Although it might seem self-evident that killing is bad and people who do it for a living deserve our disapproval, the reaction of at least one trio of immature readers to the *X-MEN* Arcade two-parter demonstrates that this is not always the case. In a letter of comment printed in *X-MEN #129*, Stephanie, Mario, and Mark Hyacinth come to the astonishing conclusion that *because* "The mind of Arcade is young, and full of psychotic games of death...He is fantastic." It is obvious from the context that by "fantastic" they mean wonderful, not unbelievable.

In *MARVEL TEAM-UP #65-66*, scripter Chris Claremont appears to make a concerted effort to prevent any such moral confusion. Arcade is first shown in the process of dickering with two top-level Maggia officials who plan to permanently dispose of all fifty of the people whom their computer indicates may secretly be Captain Britain. As Roak, the senior Maggia executive, explains to Arcade, "Our

own people will handle the targets in the U.K. and Europe, but Braddock [the college student who, as the reader is about to discover, actually is Captain Britain] is in New York. To avoid complications, we felt using an American...uh...mechanic would be more appropriate" (*MARVEL TEAM-UP*). If Claremont's heavy-handed emphasis on the bloodcurdlingly methodical ruthlessness of killing 50 people because the odds are that one of them is the particular victim desired doesn't tip the reader off that he's supposed to be appalled by the planned assassinations and everyone involved in them, the reaction of the shadowy female figure eavesdropping nearby will. Upon hearing the European Maggia chieftain's presentation to Arcade, this still-unidentified mystery woman says scathingly, "Incredible. To hear Roak talk you'd think he was discussing the stock exchange, rather than planning two-score murders."

The woman's subsequent remarks prove that she is not only on the side of the angels, but is more than capable of doing something about it. This fact greatly enhances her credibility in the raw-power-dominated world of superhero comics, where right generally confers might, except in the case of morally upright, but helpless, victims and innocent bystanders, whom nobody really pays attention to anyway. The mystery woman's next words demonstrate that she is definitely a force to be reckoned with, and therefore listened to: "Eavesdropping on Roak with my shotgun mike has given me a jump on their plans. The [49] 'hits' planned for England I can handle. But the Braddock boy—I'm afraid he's on his own." (*MARVEL TEAM-UP* #65, *p.*7). Although we later (much later) discover that the mystery woman's way of "handling" the proposed British killings is to "do a Punisher-type number" on the European Maggia's board of directors (*MARVEL TEAM-UP #66, p. 31*), which renders her qualifications for passing judgment on others somewhat questionable, to say the least, her initial remarks have already firmly set the disapproving tone that the reader is obviously intended to take toward the hired assassin Arcade and all his works, no matter how perversely amusing they may be.

In the *X-MEN* tale, on the other hand, Claremont neglects to supply any such introductory moral framing device, and even omits to give any of the "good" characters a chance to make any coherent comments on Arcade's obvious criminal insanity until the beginning of the second part of the story. This is far too late for the more susceptible readers, who by that time have already been seduced by the razzle-dazzle pyrotechnics of Arcade's ingenious pinball deathtraps, portrayed in loving detail, complete with cackling commentary by the off-the-wall assassin himself, for over half of the first installment of the story.

Another feature of *MARVEL TEAM-UP* #65-66 which the *X-MEN* Arcade story lacks is heroes who are both the villain's clear moral superiors and his equals in terms of ability to generate intense audience response. In the *MARVEL TEAM-UP* two-parter, Spider-Man and Captain Britain behave in a conspicuously heroic and altruistic manner, risking their own lives to save each other and Captain Britain's girlfriend, Courtney Ross. Spider-Man's strong sense of responsibility toward others, which motivates him to struggle harder to survive for their sake as well as his own, is established almost at once after he and Captain Britain regain consciousness inside two of the giant pinballs in Arcade's machine. When Spidey's initial efforts to use his spider-strength to break out of the giant pinball fail, he almost yields to dispair, then railies, exclaiming, "No! I've too much to live for, too many people counting on me! I'm Spider-Man—and if that means anything...it means I don't give up!" (*MARVEL TEAM-UP#66*, p. 7). So saying, the arachnid adventurer shatters his own previously unbreakable

CAPTURING THEM TURNED OUT TO BE A CINCH. START TO FINISH, I CORRALLED THE ENTIRE TEAM -- WITH YOU LOVELY LADIES AS AN UNEXPECTED BONUS -- INSIDE OF AN HOUR *
THEY NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT THEM.
*LAST ISSUE

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"Although it might seem self-evident that killing is bad and people who do it for a living deserve our disapproval, the reaction of at least one trio of immature readers to the X-MEN Arcade two-parter demonstrates that this is not always the case."

pinball and then hurries to help his British colleague do the same. The hokey, but nevertheless effective, drama of this moment, of Captain Britain's risking drowning in a room rapidly filling with water in order to remain at the controls which can release Courtney from the suffocating vacuum of yet another giant pinball, and of Spider-Man's deliberately walking into a trap in order to save Captain Britain, by now over his head in water (*MARVEL TEAM-UP* #66, pp. 17, 22-23, 26), showcases the heroes' goodness, courage, and concern for their fellows as an eyecatchingly positive force that acts as an effective counterweight to Arcade's manic charisma.

In the *X-MEN* story, on the other hand, the "heroes" come across as panicky trapped rabbits who survive Arcade's traps simply because their total super-powers are more than the fun-loving killer bargained for. The New X-Men escape death by luck, raw power, and Arcade's mad whim, not because they particularly deserve to or do anything more consciously heroic than trying to save their own individual necks. Far from knowingly walking into traps to save their teammates,

the various New X-Men scramble desperately from one pinball torture chamber to another, smashing their way through walls only to find themselves in the middle of someone else's deathtrap and save him almost by accident, or as a side effect of saving themselves. The few feeble efforts at deliberate teamwork are too often ineffectual, as when Cyclops tries to rush protectively after Wolverine, who has been flung through a revolving wall by a brainwashed Colossus, only to find the opening sealed shut before he can reach it (*X-MEN* #124, p. 6).

All in all, the New X-Men make a rather dismal showing. Neither convincingly competent and heroic in the conventional sense, nor particularly compelling in their own right as characters, they are pathetically poor competition for Arcade in terms of grabbing and holding reader attention. The New X-Men come across as so confused and confusing in every way, especially morally and psychologically, that they can't even carry out the minimal Comics Code mandate of "Heroes must win, villains must lose" that Claremont claimed (in response to my letter in the letter column of *X-MEN* #129) as partial justification of the ultimately meaningless psychic and physical violence of the Arcade story. The "heroes" win in *X-MEN* #123-124 only in the sense that they are still alive at the end of the story, less by their own efforts or merit than because Arcade, having used up all his prepared deathtraps, decides to release them so he can toy with them again some other time. There is no sense that justice has triumphed, only that a group of people more or less arbitrarily designated "our heroes" has survived by the skin of their teeth, for the sole purpose of fighting someone else equally arbitrarily designated "villain" for our viewing pleasure next month. The New X-Men aren't super-heroes—they're mere super-survivors.

Although the New X-Men are certainly woefully inadequate as the heroic "valid models for imitation" that John Gardner considers essential components of good moral fiction,[3] the most alarming feature of *X-MEN* #123-124 is Claremont's presentation of the villain. In Arcade's initial appearance in *MARVEL TEAM-UP*, the primary focus of the story is on the heroes, Spider-Man and Captain Britain. For the most part, events are shown when and as the heroes see them, except for a few "meanwhile, back at Luthor's Lair"

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"All in all, the New X-Men make rather a dismal showing. ...they are pathetically poor competition for Arcade in terms of grabbing and holding reader attention."

"The disturbingly blase, death-is-just-another-gimmick attitude evinced by the comics creators responsible for these shoddy stories is hardly desirable, since it leads them to desensitize the reader to violent death through literal overkill..."

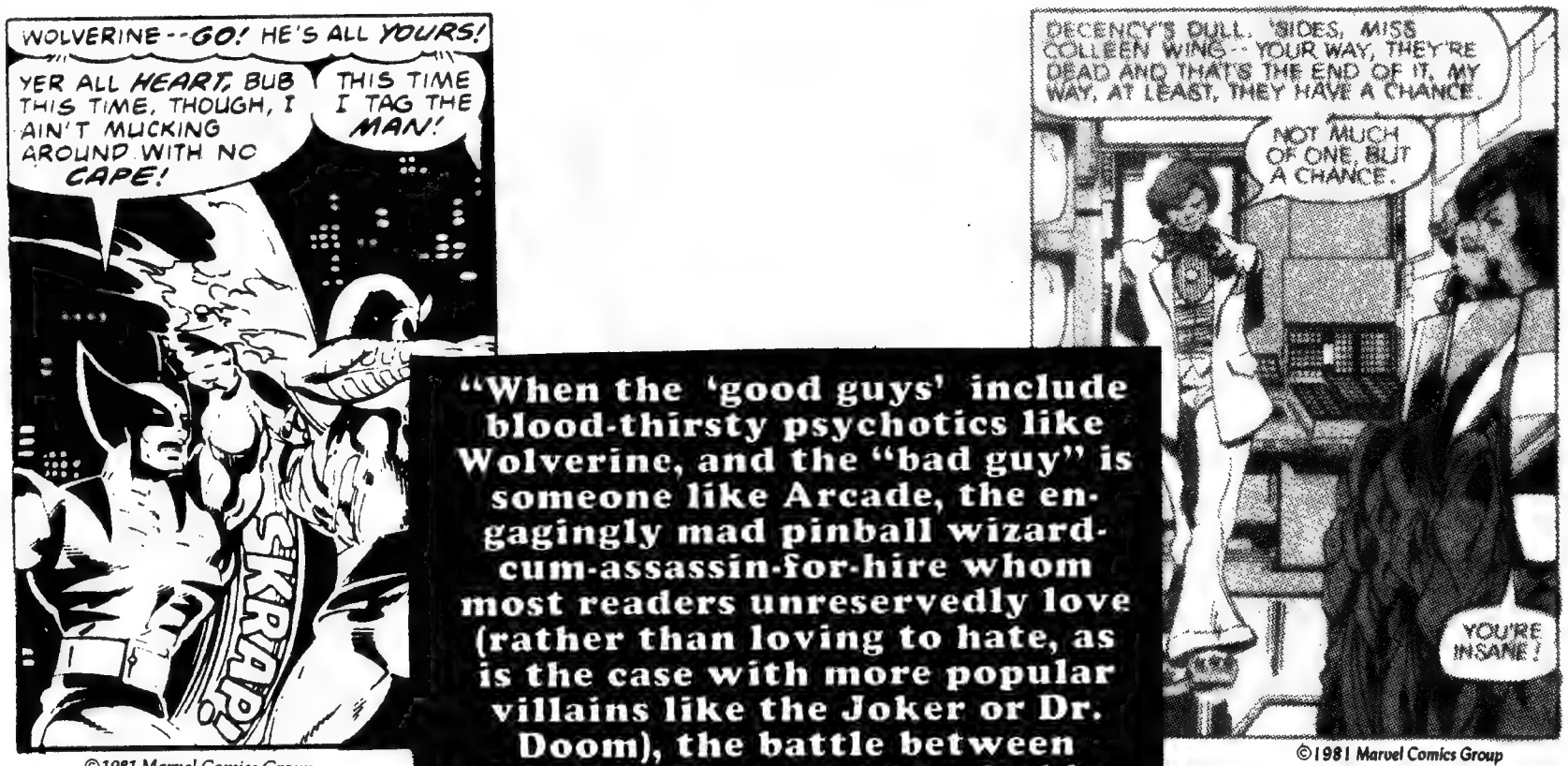
type sequences included to heighten suspense and prepare the reader for what will happen later. Although Arcade is shown to have a number of intriguing qualities likely to make readers want to see more of him in the future, he is distanced from the reader by the disapproving context established by the mystery woman's scornful remarks at the beginning of the story, and by the heroes' eloquently portrayed horror at their own desperate situation and the danger to the helpless innocent bystander, Courtney Ross. Reader sympathy for the villain is further discouraged by the brevity and tone of Arcade's appearances, in which he is portrayed as the kind of querelous boss who snaps nastily at his employees when they disturb his absorption in the bizarre pinball game to offer the vital information that they've lost track of Spider-Man and that the main systems are malfunctioning (*MARVEL TEAM-UP* #66, pp. 22, 27). All of these factors combine in the *TEAM-UP* story to hold Arcade at arm's length from the reader, forcing him/her to keep the crazed pinball wizard's true villainy in mind throughout the story.

In the *X-MEN* two-parter, far from being held at a distrust-inducing distance, Arcade is the character whose vantage point we are most required to share. The first three pages of the second part of the story are entirely devoted to the offbeat villain's account of his origins and philosophy, with the ostensible stars of the book, the New X-Men, appearing only on a viewscreen in the background of page 1. Although he does not dominate the remaining pages of the two-parter quite so exclusively, most of the action throughout is seen from what is specifically identified as Arcade's physical and psychological point of view. Claremont and Byrne continually cut from the New X-Men to the control room for extended reaction shots of the chortling assassin. Arcade's gleeful comments also spill over into the scenes of the New X-Men struggling in his traps, since such scenes are usually introduced as something seen on the control room viewsceen and accompanied by jeering voiceovers from the villain. With Arcade's extended monologues introducing not only the second installment of the story, but also most of the interludes devoted to the New X-Men throughout the two-part tale, it would be difficult indeed for the reader not to become infected with the villain's insane attitudes, especially since these attitudes are only belatedly and ineffectually verbally opposed, not by the "heroes" themselves, but by the trussed-up hostage Colleen Wing, herself morally tainted (as longtime followers of Claremont's writing well know) by a past that includes several murders committed to avenge the assassination of her grandfather.

The reader is further encouraged to park his or her con-

HIYA, KIDS, HIYA HIYA!! IT'S YOUR OLD PAL ARCADE...
...COME TO ENTERTAIN, DAZZLE AND DELIGHT YOU WITH MORE PINBALL PYROTECHNICS!!
...AND TO CONTINUE TO BE SO FLASHY, DEBONAIR, AND ENJOYABLE YOU'D NEVER STOP TO THINK...
...THAT I'M THE STRIP'S VILLAIN!
TAP! TAP! TAP! TAP! TAP! TAP! TAP! TAP! TAP!

character ©1981 Marvel Comics Group


WOLVERINE--GO! HE'S ALL YOURS!
YER ALL HEART, BUB THIS TIME, THOUGH, I AIN'T MUCKING AROUND WITH NO CAPE!
THIS TIME I TAG THE MAN!
SKRAKK!
DECENCY'S DULL. 'SIDES, MISS COLLEEN WING -- YOUR WAY, THEY'RE DEAD AND THAT'S THE END OF IT. MY WAY, AT LEAST, THEY HAVE A CHANCE.
NOT MUCH OF ONE, BUT A CHANCE.
YOU'RE INSANE!
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"When the 'good guys' include blood-thirsty psychotics like Wolverine, and the "bad guy" is someone like Arcade, the engagingly mad pinball wizard-cum-assassin-for-hire whom most readers unreservedly love (rather than loving to hate, as is the case with more popular villains like the Joker or Dr. Doom), the battle between heroes and villain inevitably forfeits its traditional symbolic overtones..."

science by the door and share Arcade's perverse emotions by Claremont's and Byrne's relentless playing up of the "fun" aspects of attempted murder by pinball machine. Again, this is a marked change for the worse from the first Arcade story, in which Claremont seems to have some misgivings about allowing the audience to become too enthusiastic about the pinball-playing villain. In the *MARVEL TEAM-UP* story, which also features much more subdued art (by Byrne and Dave Hunt), without the plethora of dazzling detail added to the various mechanisms of destruction by inker Terry Austin in the *X-MEN* tale, Claremont, apparently concerned that readers might enjoy Arcade's antics too much, deliberately takes steps to prevent this. Midway through the deadly pinball game, Captain Britain, arriving in a funhouse hall of mirrors whose danger has not yet been revealed, remarks, "I... have to keep reminding myself how dangerous this 'Murderworld' [Arcade's name for his giant pinball machine park] is. But it's all so absurd... it's almost fun" (*MARVEL TEAM-UP* #66, p. 11).

Obviously, Claremont fears that the readers also need to be reminded that attempted murder is dangerous, although his anxiety that they may be so amused by the killer's zany M.O. as to forget this seems excessive and unjustified here. In this story, though not, regrettably, in the *X-MEN* two-parter, the heroes' peril is convincingly real enough to outweigh whatever enjoyment readers may derive from the absurdity of the concept of a giant pinball machine as a murder weapon. The basically serious tone of the entire *MARVEL TEAM-UP* story, and especially the introductory sequence of Arcade with the chillingly cost-efficient Maggia chieftains, which leaves little doubt that the high-priced assassin means business, reveal Claremont's half-suppressed idea that dodging deadly pinballs can be "fun" for the would-be victim (not to mention the spectator) as the utter nonsense it is.

Unfortunately, this is not true in the *X-MEN* story, where the heroes' plight in the deadly pinball machine is all but played for laughs, the deathtraps too inefficiently loony and the tone set by Arcade's recurring voiceover narration too dementedly jovial for the threat of death to be taken seriously. It is here that the writer has most need of the self-conscious concern over the readers' possible dazzling into moral insensibility that he demonstrated in the earlier story, and it is precisely here that that concern is completely lacking. In the 18 months since Arcade's cautiously-handled debut in the two-part *MARVEL TEAM-UP*, Claremont has become dead to all considerations of anything higher than entertaining the groundlings with flashy stunts.

In his preoccupation with providing his, Byrne's, and Austin's adoring fans with the ever more mind-blowing four color sensory overloads they seek, Claremont has entirely lost track of the basic idea of good vs. evil that traditionally underlies super-hero comics. In its place, he has provided us with a morally meaningless gladiatorial combat between unheroic heroes and a villain whom he and his co-creators consistently present as nothing worse than a high-tech showbiz trickster with a slightly weird sense of humor. In the *X-Men* story, the fact that playing Murderworld pinball can be hazardous to your heath—even fatal—really does get lost in the shuffle, along with the awareness that a person who torments and kills others for a living is vicious and depraved, even if he seldom succeeds in actually murdering his victims and ultimately seems not to care whether or not he does succeed.

The *X-MEN* Arcade story refuses to take either its particular villain or the very concept of villainy seriously. Claremont has already subverted the idea of heroes as representatives of good by his continuing characterization of Wolverine, an officially designator defender of the right, as a

bloodthirsty psychotic. Now, in *X-MEN #123-4*, he subverts the idea that villains represent evil—indeed that evil even exists—by making the "bad guy" a professional assassin who is considerably less convincingly malevolent than the nominally "good" Wolverine, and by stylizing the conflict between "good guys" and "bad guys" to the point where the outcome of the struggle has no more real significance than it would in a contest of opposite but morally neutral elements like fire and water. The Arcade in this story is so deficient in credibility as a menace to life and limb that it hardly seems necessary for the New X-Men to defeat him even to ensure their own survival, much less to

LISTEN CLOSE, IRIS, 'CAUSE HERE'S A LESSON OBVIOUSLY NEVER TAUGHT YOU!
ALL YOU HAIRLESS APES SEEM SO SELF-OBSESSED, I'M NOT SURPRISED IT NEVER OCCURRED TO YOU--!
ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES.
BUT MESS WITH PEOPLE'S LIVES--AND FATE EVENTUALLY MESSES BACK!
YOU'LL GET YOURS, IRIS.
I'M NOT NEGATIVE-- I'M ANGRY (I THINK)

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"It is here that the writer has most need of the self-conscious concern over the reader's possible dazzling into moral insensibility that he demonstrated in the earlier story, and it is precisely here that that concern is completely lacking."

prevent him from continuing to harm other people—an altruistic consideration which is usually one of the main motivations of more traditionally heroic good guys. In fact, it never even occurs to them to think of it this way. Even after they are safely free of Murderworld, the only New X-Man who expresses real distress that the fun-loving homocidal maniac is still on the loose is his fellow homocidal maniac, Wolverine, who is motivated purely by a savage desire for revenge, not by concern for Arcade's inevitable future victims (*X-MEN # 124*, p. 30).

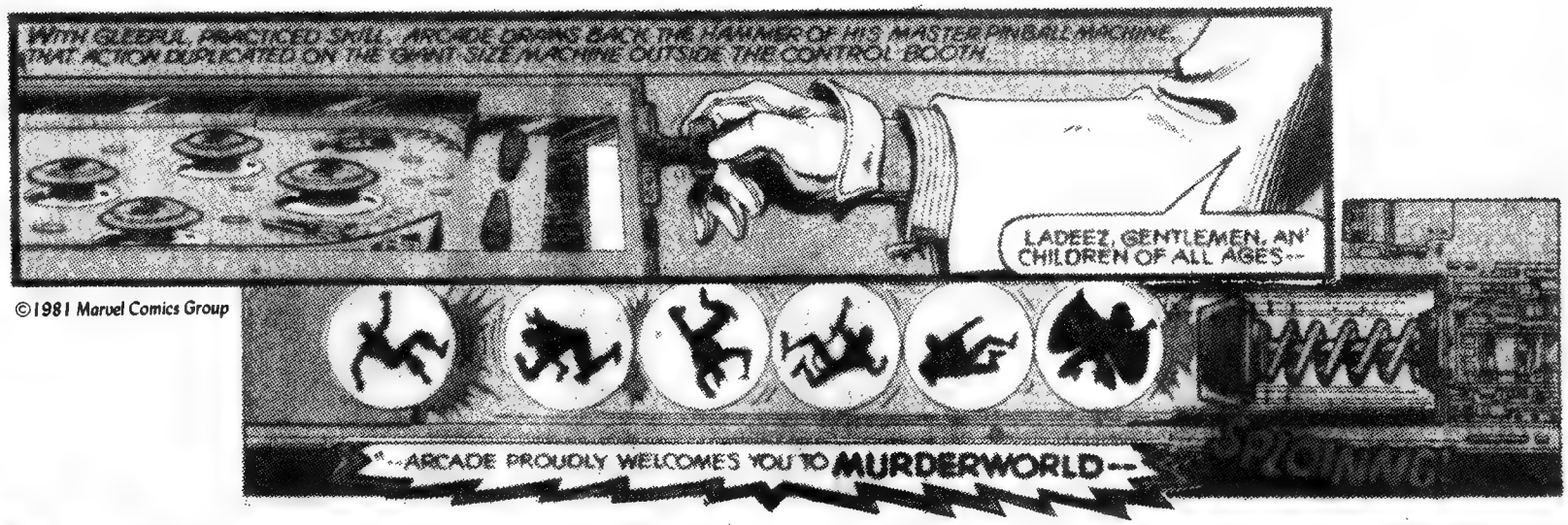
Even Arcade himself doesn't care about the outcome of the battle. The New X-Men's death is his declared objective, and failure to achieve it will presumably damage both his professional reputation and his pocketbook, since the people who hired him are unlikely to hand over the full assassin's fee for a botched job. Yet Arcade regards the attempted assassination as a game designed solely for his own entertainment, complaining early on that

"If comics creators refuse to take good and evil seriously, or even to make convincing distinctions between them, many of their fan followers will inevitably do likewise."

the New X-Men are not giving him as much trouble as Spider-Man did (*X-MEN #123*, p. 16, panel 1), summing up his earlier confrontation with Spider-Man and Captain Britain as "They beat me on my own turf, fair-an'-square. And I loved every minute of it" (*X-MEN #124*, p. 3, panel 4), and voluntarily releasing the exhausted X-Men after they escape the particular deathtraps he had prepared especially for them in advance.

Thus, despite his boastful claims of murderous skill (which are never convincingly substantiated on panel), Arcade comes across not as a cheerful but genuinely determined cold-blooded killer, but as basically a harmless crank with delusions of grandeur. Seen in this light, the mad pinball wizard's worst crime is kidnapping super-heroes and forcibly putting them through their paces in his own private danger room. Arcade can brag as much as he likes about "Murderworld—Where Nobody Ever Survives!", but the fact is that even in the flashbacks of his previous career as an assassin on non-super-powered individuals, nobody ever dies in his giant pinball machines. (Even the one flashback scene on p. 3, panel 2 of *X-MEN #124* of a man staggering after having been shot by a Murderworld android is sufficiently ambiguous to leave the reader unconvinced of Arcade's destructiveness on the all-important subliminal level, since it is never clearly established that the man actually dies as a result of the incident.) This fact, combined with the determinedly circuslike atmosphere of Arcade's operation as portrayed here by Claremont, Byrne, and Austin, causes the reader to feel that no matter how many ingenious deathtraps Arcade rigs up for the New X-Men, no real harm can come of it—which, of course, makes it perfectly all right for the rest of us to sit back and enjoy the New X-Men's ludicrous struggles as wholeheartedly as their captor does.

The entire story seems designed to give the lie to the basic moral truth Howard the Duck pointed out to the irresponsible Iris Raritan in *HOWARD THE DUCK* comic #26: "Actions have consequences." In the amoral world of *X-MEN #123-124*, the exact opposite is true: Actions, even murderous ones, do not have irreversible consequences—it's just (morally neutral) fun for Arcade, Claremont & Co., and the reader to pretend that they do. Thus, since evil actions are shown to have no ultimate effect on their victims, villainy is reduced to the breaking of stodgily-conventional rules (it's not polite to kidnap people and give them a nervewracking workout, even if you don't really hurt them), rather than believably destructive behavior which could actually cause serious harm. This kind of evil-reduced-to-mere-rulebreaking is presented with such a total lack of moral indignation on the part of the authors or the other characters, even the victims, that it seems undesirable only because it disrupts order and inconveniences people, not because it could really hurt anyone. Thus, evil is drained of its true destructive significance and diminished to an illegal and mildly annoying


WITH GLEEFUL, PRACTICED SKILL, ARCADE DRAWS BACK THE HAMMER OF HIS MASTER PINBALL MACHINE... THAT ACTION DUPLICATED ON THE GIANT-SIZE MACHINE OUTSIDE THE CONTROL BOOTH...
LADEEZ, GENTLEMEN, AN' CHILDREN OF ALL AGES--
©1981 Marvel Comics Group
"...ARCADE PROUDLY WELCOMES YOU TO MURDERWORLD--
SPLUNG

"In the X-Men story, the fact that playing Murderworld pinball can be hazardous to your health—even fatal—really does get lost in the shuffle, along with the awareness that a person who torments and kills others for a living is vicious and depraved..."

form of unconventional behavior, in much the same way as good, as represented by the New X-Men in Claremont's earlier stories, has already been drained of its constructive and life-preserving essence, being rendered instead as nothing more than a not particularly attractive commitment to upholding convention and opposing the breaking of even stuffily unnecessary rules.

This reduction of good versus evil to upholding versus defiance of convention presents an interesting parallel to Hannah Arendt's description of the moral climate that produced Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi bureaucrat and notorious exemplar of what Arendt refers to as the banality of evil. It is Arendt's thesis that Eichmann himself was not a vicious genocidal maniac, but rather a rather ordinary man whose most horrifying quality was his slavish devotion to dutifully acting according to the conventions of the society in which he found himself, no matter how twisted these might be. Since he, like many other people, lacked a strong internalized sense of right and wrong, Eichmann's only real standard for judging whether something was good or evil was whether or not it was socially acceptable. Placed in an environment where it was not only socially acceptable, but socially imperative, to kill Jews, it did not occur to him to seriously question whether genocidal policies which had been so easily established as law and accepted by the vast majority of the population might possibly be wrong in some sense transcending mere legality and public opinion. The widespread acceptance of genocidal activity as nothing more than a new aspect of the standard social behavior routinely expected of a good German, and the critical importance to Eichmann of fulfilling the expectations and gaining the approval of his peers and superiors, is illustrated by Arendt's account of the Nazi bureaucrat's reaction to the Wannsee Conference, or Conference of the Under-secretaries of State.

...As the formal name of the conference indicates, the meetings had become necessary because the Final Solution, if it was to be applied to the whole of Europe, clearly required more than tacit acceptance from the Reich's State apparatus; it needed the active cooperation of all Ministries and of the whole Civil Service [cooperation which Eichmann's superiors feared they would have trouble obtaining, since few of the civil servants were Nazi party members or otherwise owed allegiance to the Nazis to an extent which suggested they would feel willing or obligated to assist in the party's plans for the extermination of an entire ethnic group]...

...[Unexpectedly, far from resisting participation in the implementing of the Final Solution], the members of the various branches of the Civil Service did not merely express opinions [about the practical feasibility of various genocidal proposals] but [themselves] made concrete propositions [of this nature] ...It was a very important occasion for Eichmann, who had never before mingled socially with so many "high personages"; he was by far the lowest in rank and social position of those present...

There was another reason that made the day of this conference unforgettable for Eichmann. Although he had been doing his best right along to help with the Final Solution, he had still harbored some doubts about "such a bloody solution through violence", and these doubts had now been dispelled. "Here now, during this conference, the most prominent people had spoken, the Popes of the Third Reich." Now he could see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears that not only Hitler, not only [his own immediate superiors], not just the S.S. or the Party, but the elite of the good old Civil Service were vying and fighting with each other for the honor of taking the lead in these "bloody" matters. "At that moment," [Eichmann stated], "I sensed a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling, for I felt free of all guilt." Who was he to judge? Who was he "to have [his] own thoughts in this matter" [when better people than he

"It is Arendt's thesis that Eichmann himself was not a vicious genocidal maniac, but a rather ordinary man whose most horrifying quality was his slavish devotion to acting dutifully according to the conventions of the society in which he found himself, no matter how twisted these might be."

found the prospect of mass murder so eminently acceptable?[5]

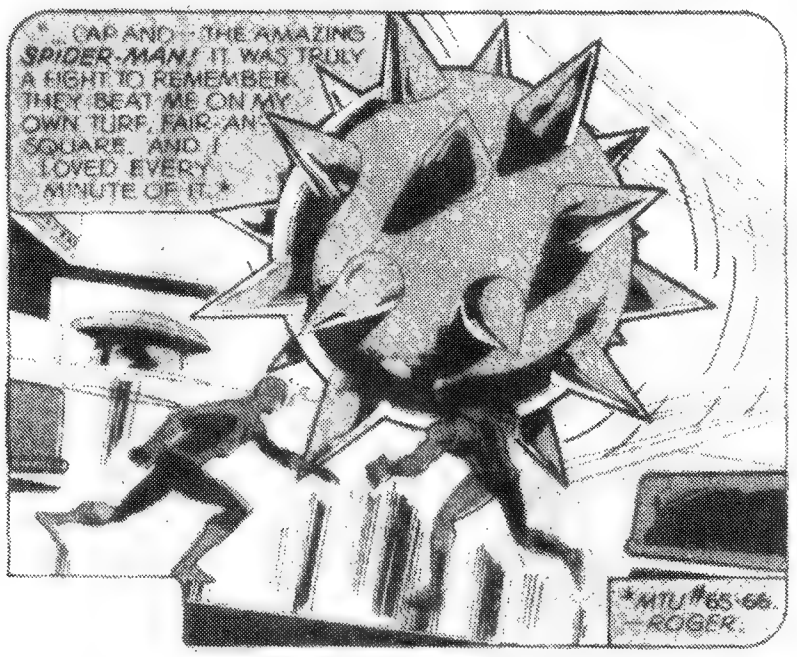
Eichmann, then, did evil deeds not because he was a particularly evil man, but because the standard behavior of the time and place required it. An inveterate conformist, Eichmann might break the most basic moral laws, but this was only because he was determined not to break the changeable and superficial rules of current social convention, which were infinitely more important and meaningful to him.

Conversely, Arcade appears to commit what are normally considered evil deeds, not because he himself is particularly evil, but because it is the most dramatic way of violating social convention, Arcade being as obsessed with violating convention as Eichmann was with conforming to it. Both Eichmann and Arcade have no concept of morality as anything more ultimately significant than a form of situation ethics in which "being good" is merely fulfilling the capricious and arbitrary expectations of society. These expectations may change from day to day, since in this view, nothing is good (because life-preserving) or evil (because destructive); the "morality" or "immorality" of an action is determined solely by its conformity or lack of conformity with what is considered socially acceptable behavior at the moment. "Right" and "wrong" have nothing to do with whether life and liberty are preserved or destroyed, but are a matter of the maintaining or violation of abstract and superficial rules. The content and intended purpose of these rules is a matter of equal indifference to the pinball-playing assassin and the Nazi bureaucrat, both of whom regard the means of rules as an end in itself. The chief difference between them is that Arcade breaks rules purely for the sake of breaking them and Eichmann follows rules purely for the sake of following them. The deeper significance of those rules, the ideals they are designed to enforce, and the real consequences of enforcing them or disobeying them, are equally meaningless to both men.

Unfortunately, this amoral vision of reality, in which the label "good" and "evil" have no more immutable significance than the red and black colors of the opposing sides in a game of checkers, is precisely the kind of world view that a story like *X-MEN #123-124*, in which evil is systematically drained of its real menace and good of its emulation-inspiring attraction, encourages in the more susceptible reader. By including an unrepentant psychopathic killer like Wolverine among the heroes, and by making the villain a winsomely mischievous prankster like Arcade, whose assassination attempts are whimsically ineffectual to the point of what seems almost intentional harmlessness, Claremont creates the impression that the unending struggle between good and evil is nothing more than an exciting game whose ultimate outcome is unimportant, and whose players are assigned sides in a total arbitrary manner.

When a vicious murderer is cast as a defender of the right, and the "bad guy" is an engagingly wild and crazy guy whose zanily over-elaborate deathtraps are so loonily unlikely to succeed that it's impossible to believe he really wants them to, their conflict becomes utterly meaningless in moral terms, or in any terms other than those of pure spectacle. "Villains" and "heroes" are reduced to mere games-playing rivals. Whether a particular super-person chooses to fight for good or evil becomes as much of a minor detail in the grand scheme of things as which of two rival teams a promising ball player decides to sign with. Since the battle of good and evil is little more than a game, which side the individual super-person chooses to join has little or nothing to do with how good or evil, nice or nasty he himself is, only with whether he has the obsession to enforce rules (which makes him a hero) or the particular drive to break rules and risk tangling with super-heroes (which makes him a villain). The fact that rules are usually there for a reason and that breaking them can have drastic consquences for innocent people is glossed over to the extent of being shoved under the rug.

Fortunately, so far Chris Claremont is the only comics writer whose morally reductive presentation of "heroes" and "villains" undeserving of those names goes this far toward reducing good versus evil to a meaningless game. However, he is far from the only exemplar of the growing tendency toward refusal to take evil or its consequences seriously. As Beppe Sabatini pointed out in a recent article in *THE COMIC READER*,[6] the increasingly callous attitude toward murder displayed by many comics creators has resulted in at least eight offhanded assassinations of significant characters in 1979 alone. A number of these deaths—for instance, the deaths of Batwoman (*DETECTIVE COMICS #485*), Sharon Carter (*CAPTAIN AMERICA #237*), and the grotesquely mismanaged death of the Earth-Two Batman (*ADVENTURE #461*)—were so gratuitous and ineptly handled that Sabatini has invented a tellingly descriptive specialized term for them: Trivia Death.


...CAP AND...THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN! IT WAS TRULY A NIGHT TO REMEMBER. THEY BEAT ME ON MY OWN TURF, FAIR AN' SQUARE. AND I LOVED EVERY MINUTE OF IT.
*MUTTERS OK. ROGER.

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"With Arcade's extended monologues introducing not only the second installment of the story, but also most of the interludes devoted to The X-Men throughout the two-part tale, it would be difficult indeed for the reader not to become infected with the villains insane attitudes..."

The disturbingly blase, death-is-just-another-gimmick attitude evinced by the comics creators responsible for these shoddy stories is hardly desirable, since it leads them to desensitize the reader to violent death through literal overkill, usually aggravated by grossly inadequate depiction of the actual impact the death of a loved one has on the survivors. But although these "Trivia Death" stories do tend to undermine the reader's perception of the seriousness of the crime by using murder as little more than an excuse for the hero to make a jaw-clenched vow of vengeance before rushing off to pursue the villain (after a mere one or two perfunctory panels of mourning), at least this presentation, inadequate as it is, does make clear that murder is evil. However, in at least one other recent case besides *X-MEN #123-124*, even this flawed recognition that criminal activities are more than basically harmless episodes of rulebreaking is lacking. I refer to the four-part Brickface/Trowel "*Plastic Man*" story in *ADVENTURE #470-473*.

Scripter Marty Pasko exhibits slightly dubious taste in this story from the start. Woozy Winks' queasy reaction to the sight of a semi-mummified corpse riddled with cement-encrusted stab wounds hardly seems to merit the frivolous response it receives from Plastic Man:"Hmph! I *told* him to lay off those cheap hot dogs!" (*ADVENTURE #470*, story 2, p. 2). Except for this one incident, the actual murder and its perpetrators are handled without inappropriate attempts at uproarious humor. However, the presentation of Cindy Bloch, a witness to the crime/accomplice after the fact who has been extorting payment for her silence from the killers for two years, is so sympathetic that it comes as a real surprise to the reader when Plastic Man finally arrests her. Even after he does, the blame for Cindy's greedily irresponsible actions is misleadingly attributed entirely to her crooked lawyer, the instigator of the blackmail scheme, as if it were somehow only a minor error in judgment to conspire to conceal a murder at considerable profit to oneself as long as the whole thing was someone else's idea.

"This kind of evil-reduced-to-mere-rulebreaking is presented with such a total lack of moral indignation on the part of the authors or the other characters, even the victims, that it seems undesirable only because it disrupts order and inconveniences people..."

I MAY HAVE "LANDED IN JAIL"--BUT I WON'T STAY HERE!
IF MY LAWYER WAS SMART ENOUGH TO DREAM UP THE SCHEME THAT GOT ME ARRESTED...
...HE CAN ALSO MASTERMIND A WAY TO SPRING ME!

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Although Cindy Bloch is revealed as a blackmailer in the very first scene in which she appears, she is immediately converted into an essentially innocent damsel in distress by the abrupt intrusion of the murderers, her former employer, Brickface, and his sidekick, the Trowel. This sinister pair announces that since Plastic Man's discovery of their original victim's body has rendered Cindy's continued silence superfluous, they intend to pay her back for her previous extortion by taking her for a one-way ride to the city dump. This plan is inevitably foiled by Plastic Man, but since Cindy is portrayed in standard innocent victim fashion throughout the scene, and looks as stereotypically dewy-eyed and fresh-faced as Joe Staton's artwork can make her, the reader is slightly disconcerted by Plas' disapproving reaction to her effusive gratitude once she is rescued. Cindy's gushing expressions of thanks—"Boy, have I ever learned my lesson about getting mixed up with crooks! Oh, Plastic Man, how can I ever thank you for saving me?? (smek smek smek smek)"—do seem too extravagant and conveniently-timed to be motivated by anything but a desire to con the hero into thinking she has seen the error of her ways and letting her go. However, since Cindy has been depicted as ingratiatingly harmless so far, Plas' curt response—"For openers, you can cut out the kissy-face and give me some answers!" (*ADVENTURE #470*, story 2, p. 7) seems somewhat excessive. But this momentarily stern line is dropped when the scene is continued in the next issue. A smiling Cindy frankly explains her role in the whole sordid intrigue with no trace of embarassment at the nature of what she's confessing, with a minimum of open-handed, nothing-up-my-sleeve hand gestures and a startlingly self-confident unconcern about the fact that she's talking to a super-powered auxiliary policeman and should logically be casting furtive glances around in search of some means of making a getaway (*#471*, story 1, p.3). Her unabashed candor is so disarming that the reader is quite disconcerted to see Plastic Man apologetically tying her up to await the arrival of the N.B.I. in the next scene. Even Plas seems to feel that he owes the larcenous secretary some kind of explanation for this stuffily legalistic behavior. When his statement that "I've called the N.B.I.—but I'll have to tie you (i.e. Cindy and the Trowel) up till they arrive to take you into custody!" elicits a surprised, "Me, too?!" from Cindy, Plas gives the conciliatory reply, "Sorry—but in case you haven't heard, blackmail's against the law!" (*ADVENTURE #471*, story 1, p.3).

Plas' regret at having to arrest Cindy, and the editorial implication that the unrepentant blackmailer's illegal actions are somehow little more reprehensible than a moderately serious traffic violation, are intensified in the third installment of the story, the last one in which she appears. Although at the end of part 2 Cindy was carted off to prison emitting defiant thought balloons like, "Let 'em throw the book at me—there's no way I'll do a minute's time for extortion! I probably won't even have to plea-bargain with the D.A... not with the lawyer I've got!" (*ADVENTURE #471*, story 1, p. 9), the next installment's opening caption

describes her as "sweet young Cindy Bloch," apparently with no ironic intent. Cindy's own opening line is, "Gee whillikers! What's a nice girl like me doing in a place like this [*i.e.*, a prison cell]?" Plastic Man's sympathetic response further reinforces the suggestion that she doesn't really deserve the uncongenial fate of incarceration: "You're basically a decent sort, Cindy—merely misguided...so I'm sorry to see you land in jail...but that's usually what happens to blackmailers!" After asking Cindy if there's anything he can do to alleviate her plight, Plastic Man heads outside with sidekick Woozy Winks, who asks, "How d'ya s'pose a nice kid like that got mixed up in extortion, Plas?" The stretchable superhero unhesitatingly replies, "Her lawyer's to blame—it was his idea!" (*ADVENTURE #472, p. 1*).

The willful misdirection of blame which should by rights be shared by both the instigator and the executor of the crime suggests that one can be a blackmailer and an accessory after the fact to murder and still be a good guy—or in this case, a nice girl. The moral confusion generated by this virtual negation of Cindy's guilt and responsibility for her own actions is disturbingly reminiscent of the similar effect produced by the systematic undermining of the reader's perception of Arcade as evil in *THE X-MEN #123-4*.

Fortunately, the over-lenient presentation of Cindy Bloch's role in the blackmail plot is the only instance in the Plastic Man tale of the kind of meretricious denaturing of evil that pervades the entire *X-MEN* two-parter. In vivid contrast to *X-MEN #123-4*'s attempted-murder-as-mildly-kinky-good-fun attitude, all of the murderers in the "*Plastic Man*" story, including Cindy's crooked attorney, I.Q. Small (Lowbrow), who eventually poisons her in the hope of keeping his part in the blackmail scheme from coming to light, are portrayed as unappealing characters whose deeds are to be regarded with revulsion. But the distinction between the behavior appropriate to good guys and bad guys is still fudged in Cindy's case by the writer's insistence on her niceness and other innocent ingenue qualities even as she remains utterly unrepentant of anything but having been caught.

Plastic Man's over-indulgent explanation that sweet young Cindy was merely misled by evil companions and barely realized what she was doing just won't wash. Nobody who deliberately seeks out a lawyer with a shady reputation (most secretaries—Cindy Bloch's supposed profession—do not have personal attorneys of any kind, let alone those who dabble in extortion), and then agrees of her own free will to his proposal that they blackmail her criminal ex-employer, can be as blameless as Pasko tries to make us believe that Cindy is. Pasko's indulgent treatment of extortion and its practitioners suggests that at least when the victims are criminals themselves, blackmail is not really a serious crime, but a mere violation of an excessively legalistic rule. This ignores the fact that by doing what she did, Cindy not only displayed unbecoming greed, but also acted with criminal irresponsibility (by helping conceal her former boss' guilt, Cindy ensured that he would remain at large, free to kill again if he so chose—as he in fact did choose, when he had no further use for Cindy). Because in this story the denaturing of villainy is confined to one isolated case and is opposed by a believably heroic hero who, despite his overly

HOW D'YA S'POSE A NICE KID LIKE THAT GOT MIXED UP IN EXTORTION, PLAS?
HER LAWYER'S TO BLAME-- IT WAS HIS IDEA, TOO BAD SHE REFUSES TO NAME HIM, THOUGH--?!
GEE, THAT'S THE DUMBEST WOMAN I'VE EVER SEEN...
1

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"The willful misdirection of blame which should by rights be shared by both the instigator and the executer of the crime suggests that one can be a blackmailer and an accessory after the fact to murder and still be a good guy—or in this case, a nice girl."

CITY DUMP
...AND SINCE COTTA WAS HIMSELF A BUILDING CONTRACTOR -- AND VAN RIVETT'S CHIEF COMPETITOR...
...IT WAS LOGICAL TO SUSPECT THAT COTTA MURDERED VAN RIVETT!
AS IT TURNED OUT, HIS HENCHMAN-- MASON STUCKO-- DID THE DIRTY WORK!

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"...the distinction between the behavior appropriate to good guys and bad guys is still fudged in Cindy's case by the writer's insistence on her niceness and other innocent ingenue qualities even as she remains utterly unrepentant of anything but having been caught."

exculpatory attitude toward the sweet young extortionist, sets an admirable example of how a good person should behave, the conflict between good and evil is in little danger of being reduced to a meaningless game here, as it is in *X-MEN* #123-124. However, the trivialization of the immoral nature of criminal acts committed by such deceptively ingratiating characters as Cindy is an alarming development even when it remains an isolated anomaly instead of pervading the entire story, along with a corresponding denaturing of goodness.

Certainly there are few comics currently being produced which combine all of the morality-minimizing elements detailed above to generate a warped work of moral idiocy on the grand scale of the *X-MEN* Arcade two-parter. Unfortunately, any one of these elements: super-anti-heroes approvingly portrayed as more unscrupulous than most villains; villains whose personal charm somehow nullifies the evil import of their actions; a growing tendency for scripters to insert scenes of casually gratuitous violence and death whenever there is a slow moment in the plot; and a "good vs. evil as mere fun and games" attitude that undermines the reader's perception of the disastrous consequences immoral behavior usually has for all concerned—is enough to dazzle the more immature members of the audience into decidedly inappropriate enthusiasm over characters and actions which are essentially destructively anti-social. Despite the disclaimers of irresponsible comics creators who deny all intent of anything but "mere entertainment", even the most mindless story can have a pronounced effect on a susceptible reader's vision of reality and how to deal with it. If comics creators refuse to take good and evil seriously, or even to make convincing distinctions between them, many of their fan followers will inevitably do likewise. Ignoring this can only encourage the already-popular delusion that morality is just an abstract set of principles having no relation to life outside the Sunday School classroom, and that people can do all kinds of nasty things to each other for the real-time equivalent of 17 (or 22) pages and emerge as unscathed at the end as any of Arcade's much-vaunted but mythical victims.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The anti-divorce provision is said to be currently under reconsideration by the Comics Code Authority, due to the soaring divorce rate and the resulting likeliness that many of the young readers whom the Code is designed to protect are themselves products of "broken homes," and thus not best served by an official attitude which implies that their own parents, in separating, acted immorally.

[2] Comics Magazine Association of America, *CODE OF THE COMICS MAGAZINE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, INC.*, revised edition (New York: CCA, 1971), pp. 2, 4-5.

[3] John Gardner, *ON MORAL FICTION* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), p. 18.

Although I disagree with many of the details of Gardner's analysis of what comprises good and bad fiction and what should be done about it, I find his basic idea—that the creators of fiction have a moral responsibility to their audience—quite sound. The essentials of Gardner's position are best summed up by his definition of moral fiction:

> "By 'moral' I do not mean some such timid evasion as 'not too blatantly *im*moral.' It is not enough to say, with the support of mountains of documentation from sociologists, psychiatrists, and the New York City Police Department, that television is a bad influence when it actively encourages pouring gasoline on people and setting fire to them. On the contrary, television—or any other more or less artistic medium—is good (as opposed to pernicious or vacuous) only when it has a clear positive moral effect, presenting valid models for imitation, eternal verities worth keeping in mind, and a benevolent vision of the possible which can inspire and incite human beings toward virtue, toward life affirmation as opposed to destruction or indifference."

A bit grandiloquent, but important and worth considering.

[4] Note Cyclops' fatuous thought balloon stating that he "can't shake my instinctive distrust of this Arcade character" (*X-MEN* #123, p. 26, panel 6), as if instinctive distrust is somehow an excessive and unwarranted reaction to a person who has kidnapped you and cheerily announced that if you pick the wrong door out of his "lady or the tiger" room, you'll meet with a horrible death.

[5] Hannah Arendt, *EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM: A REPORT ON THE BANALITY OF EVIL*, revisied and enlarged edition (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 112-114.

[6] Beppe Sabatini, "*I Swear I'll Get You For This! I Swear It!: A Look at Death in the Comics*," *THE COMIC READER* #178, March 1980, pp. 20, 50, 53.

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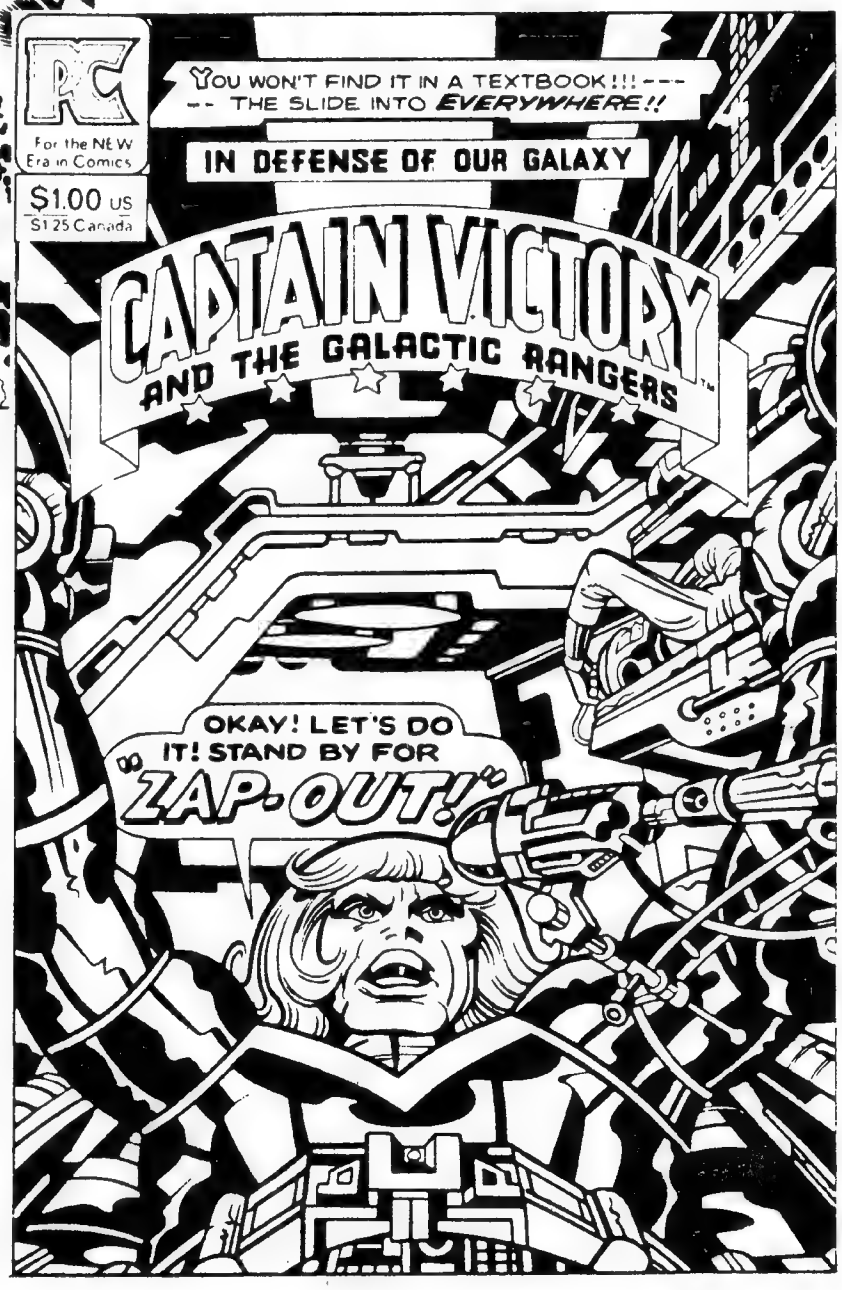
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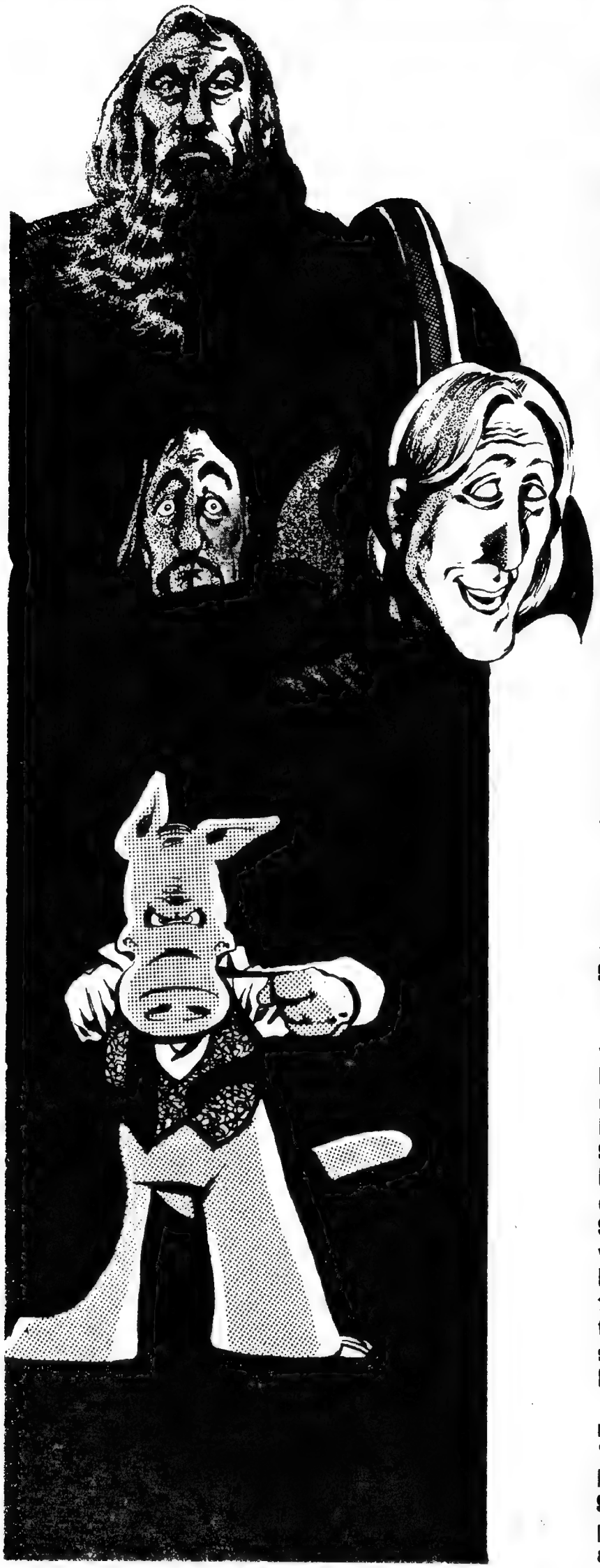
A TALK WITH AN AARDVARK



[The interview took place at the Chicago ComiCon on July 16, 1982. Dave was sitting in the artists' room, working on an intricate sketch of Arnold the Isshurian, a character he'd created for an upcoming issue of **Epic**. As he drew, an assembly of fans and I asked him questions, beginning with a discussion of how he created the character of Julius for his **Cerebus the Aardvark**.]

SIM: In comedic terms, the heavens part, great beams of light come down, and you say, "This is somebody you give a **major** role to. And the thing that's so beautiful is that I can **age** him. I can do the Groucho[Marx] from **You Bet Your Life** with the receding hairline—you know, the real mustache. And then you can do Groucho as an old man, as he was when **I** first saw him on television.

It's very odd. He died two months before the first issue of **Cerebus** came out. If there is a profound regret, it's that Groucho never got to see Lord Julius. [sigh.] I would have sent him one; I would have. I would have sent it care of one of the people who were writing books about him. Brilliant character, brilliant characterization.

FAN: Someone's going to ask if Terry Austin inked this[the Arnold drawing].

SIM: Terry Austin hair patterns, that's right. That's the nice thing. I like doing characters that are **made** of something. I mean, Cerebus is made of 30% tone. The Elf is made of the shimmer, a very light outline. It's not just that they **look** different; they're **drawn** different. Each person is rendered in a different way. Groucho is very high-contrast. Moon Roach is drawn like Neal Adams drew him. [I would have to say I am in no way opposed to Bill Sienkiewicz using his style. **Neal** isn't using it, I'll tell you that. I heard from somebody today who works for Pacific Comics that Neal's got five pages done on **Ms. Mystic**. He'll get around to it, don't you worry. Just don't put a schedule on it.]

MAGGIE: If I seem out of breath, it's because I've spent hours running around the convention trying to locate my tape recorder.

SIM: I lost a tape recorder at a convention that I had just interviewed Berni Wrightson on—and the tape was still in. Ninety minutes of Berni Wrightson. I did find it, but it was a very rough while till I found it—just sheer panic.

MAGGIE: Fred Patten wrote you a long letter of comment, which you published and then crushed. Did you ask him to write that letter?

SIM: No, I didn't.

MAGGIE: You really destroyed his complaints about the comic.

SIM: I do that intentionally. I do that to inhibit the people who might be prone to write a letter like that. No, Fred had written it entirely of his own volition, and I really don't feel like I really cut him to shreds, but it was to illustrate the fact that, if I'm making up the book, I can make up some pretty good reasons why I'm right and he's wrong. Even if he was right when I got the letter.

I can change my mind and say, "Yeah, I'll fix that in the next issue," and tell him he's full of shit. Do I say, "Fred's full of shit" into a tape recorder?

FAN: I like the bit with Cerebus getting his hair cut.

SIM: Yeah, I like doing things like that. I like having people's hair grow. Hair does not grow in comic books, and I think that's a shame, because, if you're not wat-

ching for those **small** bits of continuity, you're not paying attention to the **big** continuity, because it's not a real person to you.

FAN: Sue Storm changed her hair.

SIM: Yeah, but that's when an artist takes over, an artist changes and he says, "Well, this is the thing I'm going to bring in on the book that says it's me that's doing it."

I wanted to do for the first time a three-hundred issue story, where it's not—"This is really good," like the guy said in the letter, "when's Bill Mantlo taking over?" Comic fans are paranoid about that. **I** was paranoid about that! **Swamp Thing**; I like it too much. It's going to die, I know it. It didn't die, but Wrightson left—same difference.

Neal Adams does—what?—ten issues, thirteen issues of **Green Lantern/Green Arrow**. Mike Kaluta does—what?—eight, nine issues of **The Shadow**. I mean, you get so used to that as being the way of the world, that if it's good, it's not going to be here very long, so we'd better get them all right now. That's depressing. That's a bad attitude. I think it's bad for comics.

FAN: I never heard of **Cerebus** till I came to this con, and some guy said it was the best comic there ever was.

SIM: Yeah, I gave him $10 to say that.

FAN: Is there any Cerebus fan organization?

SIM: There is the Friends of Cerebus, the fan club has 160 members. It's nice to have that association; it's very good to not feel like we're groping around in the dark.

MAGGIE: Are there any female aardvarks floating around?

SIM: Oh, God, if I had a nickel for every time I was asked that! Female aardvarks— In the story—

I don't want to talk about it, because it could be a thing; it could not be a thing. But I did get a very nice T-shirt from a girl named Janet Kramer, and it had a female aardvark on it. And it said on it, "Cerebus, shmerebus." It is the T-shirt that I wear on a "Cerebus, shmerebus" day. "**You** got it. 'Cerebus, shmerebus,' man," that's what **I** say.

FAN: In issue #11 it's winter; then when he's leaving it's through the water, and he says the water's warm.

SIM: You see, it went from late winter, and then there was thaw and then there was the situation where it was the best three weeks of Cerebus' life, while they were moving the gold out and putting it somewhere else, so there was a long stretch in there. [Thought he had me on that one, boy.]

No, I actually sat down with the first thirty-eight issues and said, "OK, I've been doing it all along." Like I just looked at the last issue and went, "OK, there's that season. How much further along is this one?" But I never went back to make **sure** that I did. And I went back, and it was all there.

MAGGIE: You've parodied everything under the sun; what do you parody next?

SIM: They just crop up. You need a character for a specific function, and that's where it comes from—"I need a character who's like this." The Regency Elf started off as the Regency Hermit, an old guy with a long beard that just hung around in the walls and would just come bursting into people's rooms. But there was a quality to it that wasn't going to work, because the reason I wanted to introduce the character was so Cerebus would have somebody to talk to—the same reason they introduced Jimmy Olsen into **Superman**. Because they were on the radio, and he had to have somebody to talk to.

That's basically all it is: You have to have a function in mind for the character, and then it either develops into a real popular character or it's just another one of the group. I find that people tend to be crazy about the characters I just sort of toss off.

Astoria is one of my favorite characters, easily. I love doing a real, ordinary person—like an extraordinary female but, at the same time, she's not a broad caricature of any kind. Just to be able to do a group of females—and I haven't really done one since Red Sophia that was really built out to here. I get so **sick** of that in comics that—

FAN: Red Sophia was a take-off, at that.

SIM: Exactly, and if you did a flat Red Sonja— Well, that'd be funny in itself. That would be kind of a joke. I like that.

One of the big reasons that I decided to do the "High Society" story was to get more females into the story, because if you're talking about out in the countryside or you're talking about the smaller towns and what-not in the book, females are not much in evidence. Females are never much in evidence in those environs, because they are dangerous. They just don't go out walking around, finding things to do. Whereas in Iest [which is a very, very upperclass sort of place] it far more lends itself to female characters.

BUG!

BUG!!

MAD FINANCIERS! SELLING ORPHANS TO MEET THEIR STOCK MARGINS!!

WHERE?

WHERE?

LOWER FELDA!!

"TO LOWER FELDA" HE CRIES!

LEAPING INTO SPACE, HE SEIZES HIS SILKEN CORD

AND IS ONCE MORE ...

WHAM!!

HOTEL SECURITY, M'LORD.

THAT PILE OF DIRTY LAUNDRY ON THE CARPET CONTAINS TWO CONVICTED FELONS.

ABRUPTLY THE MOON ROACH REMEMBERS THAT HE HAD ARRIVED IN HIS CIVILIAN IDENTITY AND THAT THERE WAS NO SILKEN CORD OUTSIDE THE WINDOW

SLIPPING INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS, HE BARELY MANAGES TO

MAGGIE: Can you provide a pronunciation guide?
SIM:

eee **est**
seh **ray** uh
the **sef rehn empire**
ish **noz** uh pur
eee no thoss
the kuh **nip** tin tribes

A lot of it is that **I** didn't pronounce it, either. I just wrote it. I write the book and then I just get a pronunciation in my mind. The first time somebody said, "How do you pronounce it?" I went, "Yuh–" "Eee–" And then "Eee **est**. Yeah! That's it! That's how you pronounce it!" I never really thought of it phonetically.

FAN: You don't sub-vocalize as you write it?

SIM: Not names and things like that. I read the dialogue out loud. The easiest way to write Elrod or write Lord Julius is just to read it, and then the next line is implied by the rhythm. You just have to picture Groucho Marx walking on stage and saying bla-bla-bla-bla-bla and then you go, "Well, the next thing he'd say would be this."

MAGGIE: In what order do you tackle the creation of a story?

SIM: Basically, well, on "High Society," it was a vague idea of where I wanted to go. You start off with this very vague, imprecise series of events that you have–touchstone lines, jokes that you can't wait to get to do, confrontations, things like that. And, after that, it's a matter of putting them in at opportune moments.

"High Society" consists of X number of points that have to be touched on in a specific order, but it doesn't have to happen on page 12 of issue 41. It can be–

Well, right now, I'm working on the campaign for prime minister. So that goes 40, 41. [I just finished 41, and now I'm working on 42.] All you do is a campaign. I know what campaigns are like, having read **Making of the President 1960** and whatnot, which is about the end of what American politics was–the classic campaign touching down with each of the bigwigs in each different vicinity and getting their approval and they'll get you the delegates that you need.

Then, it's just a matter of surrounding Cerebus with all the campaign people that you want him with. You don't take all the politicians you had in the last year. You take Dirty Fleagle and Dirty Drew and Bran Mac Muffin and the Moon Roach and then it's just a matter of playing one off of each other.

Then, from the actual plotting stage, I have a notebook that I carry with me all the time, and what I do is sit down and just write, "Issue #41, page 1, this is what happens." It's usually just a couple of lines, like for this [using **Cerebus the Aardvark #39**, page 14] it would say, "Cerebus point out window, go gettum, up, silken cord, jumps, wham." Which nobody else is going to understand, but they don't have to. It's my shorthand.

It's one of the benefits of being the writer and the artist that I will write dialogue and then, when I freeze on the dialogue and I can't picture any more, I'll start doing pictures. And, if you do a picture of Cerebus in his suit, and the Moon Roach is behind him, then I'll think, "Oh, wait a minute. What's that bit that I'm doing this issue–the Moon Roach is going to be doing this with the Elf? Let's see how they look together." And you do a sketch of that. And then you start thinking dialogue again. So

you write some more dialogue and then you write dialogue and you go, "Well, is that going to work visually?" And you sketch it out.

And I usually do it six pages at a time, knowing roughly it's got to start here, it's got to end there.

Then I go into the studio with the notebook and I look at the little, jotty note that says, "Page 1, page 2," and I go, "OK, this starts here and this is the end of page 2. He's got to be saying this." And then you just sort of play with the elements. Do I want him to be big in this panel? Do I want him to be small? Do I want him to turn around? Whatever–

And from that stage I just improvise the dialogue on the page. Usually. Sometimes, I'll sit down and write dialogue out completely. The last issue–41–I wrote the last three pages. The Elf has an enormous speech to make. And it just sort of flowed off, because that's the way the Elf tells a story. She's like an 8- or 9-year-old girl, where they just tell you da-da-da-da-da every detail of the whole thing until they get to the point, because they don't really know where the point is. They know they've got to tell you the whole thing to get it all out. So you just go, "Uh-huh." That was Cerebus' dialogue,

"Uh-huh. Uh-hun. Uh-huh." That's largely a matter of knowing your characters.

If you know your characters, the dialogue is generally implied by the situation. As I said to Deni a while ago, you just have to take a situation, like the Moon Roach's mother shows up. If the Moon Roach's mother shows up, everybody's laughing just thinking about it. Wow, that'll be really funny, a little old lady beating on him with an umbrella, or something like that. The humor is implied, because you know the character. You know who takes himself seriously or whatever.

And it varies from issue to issue. There are issues I write all the way through. Issue 28 I wrote forty pages of single-spaced dialogue and probably used five pages out of it and improvised the rest. But it was a thinking process. By writing it all down, I went, "OK, that's **not** what I want to do; now I know what I **do** want to do."

MAGGIE: Do other artist/writer combinations work that way, or do you know?

SIM: I think most of them can't, because most of them send their stuff in to be lettered. If you send it in to be lettered, you have to pencil the whole thing, send it in to be lettered, and then it comes back and you ink it.

MAGGIE: John Stanley did pencilled roughs with the word balloons' dialogue pencilled in.

SIM: Yeah, Carl Barks the same way. I've read interviews with Carl Barks saying he'd get himself into horrible messes in his stories, because he'd have some convoluted plotline, but he didn't know how it ended. And there are days I say that to Deni.

Comes Wednesday, and she's read pages 8 through 14, but that's it. I've got a weekend off, now, before I'm going to do 15, and she can't wait to see how 15's going to go. **I** can't wait to see how 15's going to go! I want to go in and do it.

MAGGIE: How do you schedule your working day?

SIM: Right now I'm working 13 hours a day, three days a week, on the actual production of pages. The rest of the time I have the notebook with me, I'm thinking about it, I'm looking at xeroxes of the pages. I'll xerox pages side-by-side to see how they're going to look across from each other in the book.

As to getting back to it when I do go in on Monday, it's usually not too tough, because I'm involved in the story. If it's too tough, it means the story isn't good enough, because it's not involving me. That's when I know it's time to sit down and go, "OK, we're going to need something else." We were going to finish off the issue with five pages of this, cram it into two pages, and do another three pages of **this**, so that I keep up my own interest.

That's a real working method that I have: If you lose interest, start cramming it together. You're being too luxurious with the amount of time it takes to tell it. Boom! Get it done. 41 was that way. 41 ends up being just about a series of one-pagers, because I went, "OK, I can do that scene in four pages and that one in about five pages and that one in about four pages." Right there, you're up to page 15, and you haven't really gotten enough of it across. To get a campaign across, it had to be: Boom! he's here. Boom! he's here. Boom! he's here. To get that impression of "If this is Thursday, this has got to be Chicago." Which I know very well, too.

MAGGIE: How many Canadian direct-distribution publishers are there?

SIM: I **am** the Canadian comic-book industry. There are no others. There was **Andromeda** in Toronto, which was put out by the Silver Snail, and that folded. There's been a lot of comic books in Canada — **Orb.** I worked on **Orb**. That's gone.

MAGGIE: Do you see your work expanding as the comics industry expands?

SIM: We are doing some outside books. We are negotiating for them, getting people interested in doing them. I don't want to get too involved in it, myself, just because I think my contribution is to be made in showing people you can do a monthly comic book and not sell it to Marvel or DC. And I think the more I can concentrate on doing stuff that hasn't been done before, the more that guy out there who said, "Well, that's a weird idea for a comic book. Nobody will buy that," will maybe take a second look at his stuff and say, "There can't be anything weirder than an aardvark, and **it's** doing OK, so—"

MAGGIE: Do you run into customs problems in shipping?

SIM: No, we have a broker, who every month makes up exactly the papers that keep all those paper people at the borders quite happy. All you have to do is find the guy who knows what papers they want. You can't go in and say, "Well, what do you want?" because you get the runaround. But if you have a broker, that't their job. And, if anything happens, we just run to Ken and say, "Ken, it didn't get across the border again. Time to do something about this."

MAGGIE: What is your print-run currently?

SIM: 15,000.

MAGGIE: Has it been steadily increasing?

SIM: It doubles every year. It was around 7,000 last year, when we started Richard Bruning doing our advertising, and that made a big difference. We're exporting 12,000 out of 15,000.

MAGGIE: In the U.S.?

SIM: Pretty much.

SIM: I think Titan handles all of it. I think Titan's taking 1,000 or 2,000. I think it's strictly through comics shops, but you don't know. A lot of it in direct sales is very much that way — that there are places that get them that you wouldn't consider direct sales outlets, and it can just be a quirky little thing. They're selling a lot in Europe, I know — the Army bases and what-not have English publications for the people who speak English over there. We're negotiating with a few other people for foreign translations, of course.

There's sort of an ongoing negotiation in those kind of deals, because somebody will sound positive, and somebody else will sound a little more positive. A lot of it is that we don't feel much real pressure to expand quickly. If I was doing **Cerebus** as a twenty-issue book, I think I'd probably be running around right now going, "Oh, I gotta find somebody to do the movie. I've gotta find somebody to do a paperback."

MAGGIE: Have you had any requests to animate **Cerebus**?

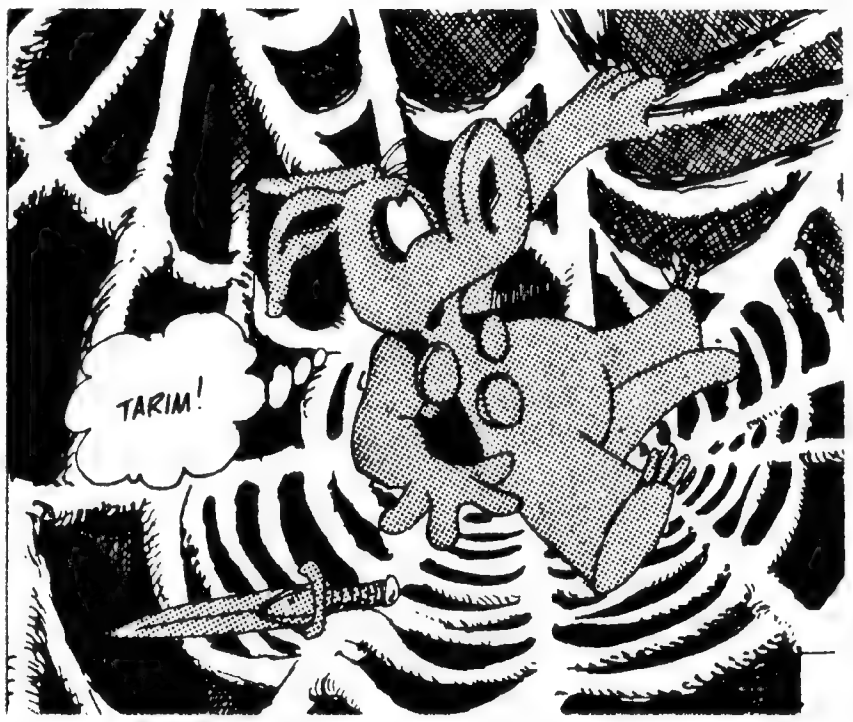
SIM: There are negotiations going on. In my case - I talked to Wendy [Pini] about this, because the big difference was that Wendy did **Elfquest** to get it made into a film. As a result, it far more lends itself — Anybody who runs an animation company can read the first five **Elfquests** and go, "Yeah, we'll buy it. I can see this on the screen."

MAGGIE: If they made a Cerebus movie, would it be live-action with Cerebus animated or a rotoscoped movie with Cerebus animated?

SIM: It's starting to sound like the more plausible way is to do the rotoscoping, because there is computer animation coming in now where you can take raw footage of a human form, put it in, and it'll break it down into a cel form. And do the color on it, as well. You don't have to have the paint. But that will be when the technology is at the point.

MAGGIE: About two years?

SIM: I would say, the way it's leaping along right now. They're talking about being able in a couple of years to buy a tape of Rome and to go down the streets. It will travel you down the streets, take you to where you just rented an apartment, and show you what the neighborhood looks like.



MAGGIE: What outside work are you doing?

SIM: Arnold the Isshurian. I just did that over a weekend for something to do — and because I had told Archie I'd do something for **Epic** a long time ago. Aside from that, most of the stuff that I'm going to be doing in the next while is going to be Cerebus-related. I can't really see going out and saying, "Well, it's time to do a science-fiction strip, because I really feel like it." I don't really feel like it, so what we're going to be doing next is like the Elfquest gatherum - do one of those ourselves. Probably another portfolio. Occasional outside work, as it appeals to me, as something comes up, if I look at it and say, "Yeah, it sounds like a lot of fun," that's what I'm prone to do.

FAN: Is there any chance of **Unique** coming through?

SIM: I think the first project that Deni is working on that will come to fruition, hopefully, will be a **Swords of Cerebus**-format book that will be Michael T. Gilbert. Probably 104 pages of Michael T. Gilbert with the new "Wraith" story in it. From there [crossing our fingers], we hope to get Gilbert to do a "Wraith" book for us regularly. Unfortunately, Michael right now has a wonderful offer from Craig Russell to work on a graphic novel with him — to ink or to assist in some way.

And I know the temptation. Marvel is the Serpent in the Garden when you get good enough. As soon as you get good enough and everybody loves your stuff, you can count on that phone call from Marvel that just — "EEEeeeaaahhh, why didn't you call six months ago?"

They called me after issue 18 or 19, right when I had decided to go monthly. If it had been six months before that, I was looking for anything I could find. There was a time when I was doing the book bimonthly; I wanted to find anything at all that I could find for the other month that I could do — and I went to a lot of places.

I tried Nelvana Animation, asking them if I could work part-time, come down one month, next month I'd draw **Cerebus.** They don't want part-time people, because it takes so long to train somebody in animation that they're there till 1:00 in the morning. It's not like I'd get there at 9:00 in the morning and leave at 5 at night. Nobody did that. I tried a lot of stuff. That's when I did the **Cerebus** strip for **The Buyer's Guide,** thinking, "Well, I'll do that. That'll take up a **few** days out of the other month." Somebody wanted me to do a monthly book was what it was, because it was no, no, no, no.

And I was sitting in the living room and I went, "By, God, I'll do it monthly! That makes sense!"

MAGGIE: How well are you able to pay yourself?

SIM: Let's try and keep it vague. I'm making on the order of about five times as much as most Marvel guys are making right now. That's because I own the company.

You see, this is where I lose sympathy for the publisher. I lose sympathy for them saying, "Oh, we can't pay the artist that! My God, we'll go broke!" They won't go anywhere **near** broke. They've got them squeezed in somewhere between the ink and the paper. The ink costs this, the paper costs that, the artist costs this.

MAGGIE: With regard to circulation, how does **Cerebus** compare with **Elfquest**?

SIM: It's been very funny. **Elfquest** comes out three times a year, and, when we were down visiting them, they were at a circulation of 50,000 — which meant

that they were selling 150,000 a year. And we were at a circulation of 12,000, which meant we were selling 160,000 a year.

You see, it balances out, but at the same time it made me think how lucky it is that I can draw fast and sell 12,000 and Wendy draws slow and sells 50,000. If I drew fast and sold 50,000, I'd be unbearable at conventions. "I'm Mr. Fantastic here [kiss, kiss, kiss], 50,000 a month!" And Wendy would be going, "Wow, you know, three times a year — 12,000. We can barely make ends meet." It's almost like there's a real justice to it.

So we brighten visibly every time we hear their circulation went up, because it's probably time for us.

We go and see Richard and Wendy, and it's hilarious to listen to, because it's not only visiting with another couple, but it's two artists bitching about publishers and two publishers bitching about artists.

"Artists make me sick!" and "Publishers make you sick!" — because publishers make all their decisions on the basis of mood. Artists make all their decisions on these high-blown ideas of "It's gotta be done this way, or we're not gonna do it at all." And Wendy and Richard will start quibbling about something, or Deni and I will start quibbling, and the other couple is laughing uproariously.

The publisher on the phone: When the publisher is on the phone talking to somebody, you can hear, "Hi! Oh, hi, how are you? Uh-huh, uh-huh, that's **great**! What? What? What is it? **What** did they say? That's **wonderful**! That's **fantastic**! What? What? What?" Then they get off the phone and they say, "Oh, it was just — I forget."

I say, "No, no! You said blahblahblah!" Then she says, "All right that's when he said, dadadadadada —" And it's the same thing.

Nobody wants to talk to the artist, because they've gotten Wendy a couple of times calling or gotten me and they say, "The shipment didn't come in." And you go, "What? Well, gee, uh, I'm an artist. You wanna picksher? I don't know where the shipment is. **Didn't** it go out on time?"

They know now: "Let me talk to somebody who knows what they're talking about."

FAN: What kind of board are you using?

SIM: Bainbridge 172.

FAN: What does it cost?

SIM: I have no idea. Deni pays for it. That's another one of those. I wouldn't know; I have no idea. I'll have my wife give you a call. [Laughs.]

GUESS WHAT

GUESS WHAT

GUESS WHAT

GUESS WHAT

GUESS WHAT

ELF. CEREBUS HAS BEEN TRAVELLING SINCE LAST NIGHT. NO RIDDLES, OKAY?

ASTORIA TOLD ARTEMIS TO FIND IT FOR HER!

OKAY. ONE RIDDLE

WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

LISTEN

LISTEN

LISTEN

LISTEN

LISTEN!

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ART BY RICHARD CORBEN BRETT BLEVINS TIM CONRAD ALFREDO ALCALA

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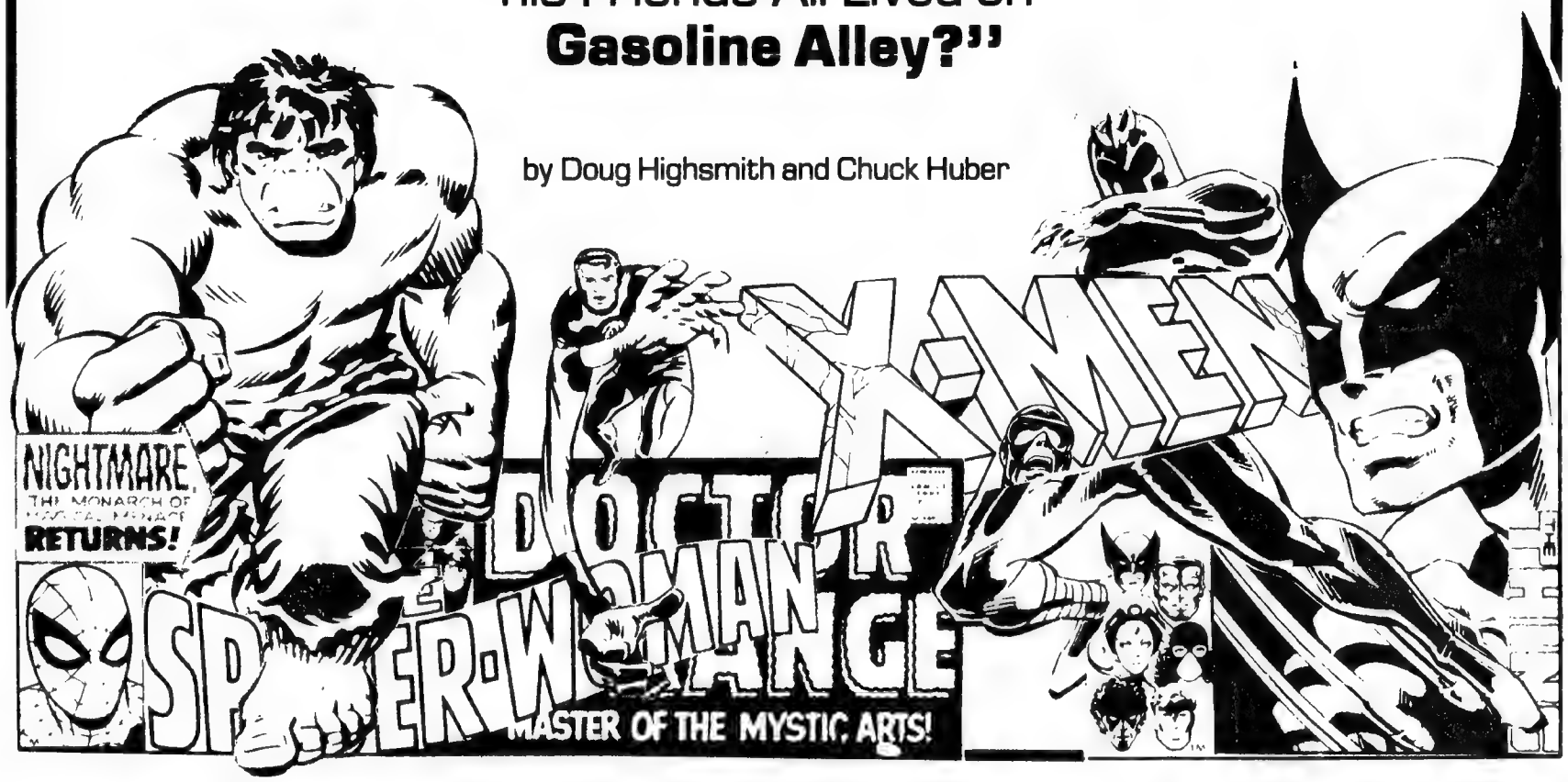
MM1

THE MARVEL CHARACTER CHRONOLOGY

or "What if Peter Parker and his Friends All Lived on **Gasoline Alley?"**

by Doug Highsmith and Chuck Huber



Scholarship into the lives of fictional characters has a long and honored tradition. Characters from Dracula to Horatio Hornblower, from Jeeves to Doc Savage, have been the subject of biographies. Most prominent of all in this respect is Sherlock Holmes, about whose life, methods, friends, foes and milieu more has been written than about most of the famous figures of history. In the spirit of Sherlockians everywhere, we decided to do a bit of scholarship in that fertile, yet relatively uncultivated field, the Marvel Universe.

In the following pages you will find an attempt to pin down the birth-years of the major characters of the Marvel Universe. First, our criteria for deciding which characters were eligible for this listing:

To qualify, a character must have appeared:

A. In his, her or its own title
B. Be title-billed in a story in an anthology title [e.g., **Marvel Premiere, Bizarre Adventures, Monsters Unleashed ...)**
C. Be title-billed in a story appearing as a backup feature [including those little 5-pagers.]
D. Be title-billed as a co-star in one of the team-up titles [e.g., **M.Team-Up, M.Two-in-One, Super-Villain Team-Up]**
E. Be a "bona fide" member of a team meeting the above criteria [e.g., **The Avengers, Champions, FF, X-Men, Alpha Flight]**

After some debate, we decided to exclude characters whose sole claim to meeting our rules was appearance in the Membership Madness issues of **Defenders** [#62-64] or the **Marvel Contest of Champions** series. One or two characters meeting all the criteria were excluded simply because neither of us thought the character deserved the dignity of research. However, as an exercise for the reader, here's a list of characters who we didn't date, and we encourage you to try if you like:

El Aguila, Arabian Knight, Blitzkrieg, Blue Shield, Captain Ultra, Collective Man, The Comet, Crimebuster, Crimson Dynamo, Cloak and Dagger, Defensor, Fin, Firebird, Guardsman, Her, Mimic Jamie Madrox, Namorita, Night Rider II, Paladin, Peregrine, Powerhouse, Razorback, Sabra, Shogun Warriors, Shamrock, Shooting Star, Spirit of '76, Tagak the Leopard Lord, Talisman, Texas Twister, Union Jack III, Ursa Major, Vanguard, Madame Masque, The Prowler, The Wraith, Golden Girl, the Human Top and Rocket Raccoon.

Please note that our criteria do include quite a wide range of characters from Dracula to May Parker, and there may be a few characters such as the new Captain Marvel who will have qualified by the time of publication who did not do so when we were writing this.

Next, the criteria for establishing a character's year of birth:

[1] Wherever possible, go by the earliest reference to the character. If there is a clear reference to the character's age in his first appearance, go with that.

[2] In order of priority, consider:
- [a] explicit references ["Born Feb. 29, 1936...]
- [b] involvement in datable events ["I remember fighting with Teddy on San Juan Hill..."]
- [c] career or educational history at the time of debut [Ph.D's older than B.A.'s older than high school students...]

[d] general apparent age [Since Marvel likes young heroes, assume as young as is reasonable...]

[3] If later references help to pin down a specific year without contradicting appearances at the time of debut, make use of them.

[4] Try, when humanly possible, to incorporate every addition and enlargement to a character's life history; that is, where they represent significant plot developments in the Marvel Universe and are not just expressions of compressed time. [Example: we felt in no way bound by the dates on Jean Grey's tombstone in **X-Men** #138, but we did try to incorporate all the various versions of the origins of Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch and company. See the discussion of "The Wundagore Mess" later in the article.]

In the lists that follow, we provide a list of characters in chronological order by birth year, along with the issue in which they make their Marvelous debut. By the by, we composed the list before the **Contest of Champions** and its exceedingly useful checklist of heroes came out. We could have saved a great deal of work by waiting a few months.

Now let's get down to business ...

Characters outside the Marvel Universe: Actually, some of the characters listed here are fairly well pinned down in time. We know that **Star Trek** takes place in the 23rd century AD, and with a bit of digging, one can even ascertain Alice Cooper's birthday. But since here we are concerned solely with a character's standing in the Marvel Universe, we're not going to try to pin down the ever-increasing number of characters published by Marvel who don't tie into the main Marvel time-line.

Indeterminate due to space travel, time travel, alien life-spans: This category includes quite a few characters both prominent and obscure. We're willing to be vague if one can only pin a character down to a particular era and not a birth year, but when a character arrives on Marvel-Earth "via" a space voyage of unknown duration or time-hopping or comes from an alternate reality, one simply can't say much. We know for instance, that Rom left Galador for Earth 200 years ago, but knowing nothing of his people's lifespans, we can't say how old he was when he became a spaceknight.

Captain Universe: A unique case, since this hero can be anyone in the world - from a child, to a pair of adult women, to Dr. Strange.

Forbush-Man: Well, even we scholarly types get to have a little fun ...

Characters before the 1800's: Here are the characters where we had to be the most vague. It's hard to pin down characters who are the stuff of legend. Still, they all have some bearing on the Marvel Universe and we found it entertaining to put them in order.

The first of the Robert E. Howard barbarians to be tied into the Marvel Universe was King Kull, in of all places, **Tomb of Dracula** #26, where the mystic artifact called the Chimera was said to date from the era of Kull. Since then, Kull and Conan have been tied in now and again as in **Marvel Team-Up** #79 with Red Sonja and the recent **Marvel Team-Up Annual** #5, in which both Kull and Conan figured in the flash-back history of the Serpent Crown. Since King Kull meets Bran Mak Morn in "Kings in the Night", the Rome-hating Pict also belongs to the Marvel Universe. The Puritan adventurer, Solomon Kane, joined when he fought Dracula [him again!] in **Dracula Lives** #3.

Most of the rest are derivable from their obvious historical period. Ulysses Bloodstone was clearly placed in his origin in **Marvel Presents** #1. Thor and his friends would have been considered indeterminably old, save for the "Origin of Odin" story which began in **Thor** #294, which stated that this group of Asgardians were spawned, following the Twilight of an earlier group of gods, coincident with the birth of Christ. The birth [using the term loosely] of the Monster of Frankenstein is hard to place exactly in the Marvel Universe, but it is safe to assume that the Moster must have been spawned some time before Mary Shelley published her version of his early life in 1818.

The Late 1800's: The Marvel Western Heroes were irretrievably tied into the Marvel Universe by Steve Englehart when Hawkeye, Thor and Moondragon went time-hopping in **Avengers** #142. While that issue itself did the trick for the Two-Gun Kid, Kid Colt, Rawhide Kid, Ringo Kid and the Night [ne Ghost] Rider, the numerous crossovers in the later Marvel western books suggest that one can hardly exclude the Gunhawks, Outlaw Kid or numerous others. The problem with Marvel's western heroes is not so much figuring out how old they were when they appeared as in figuring out when their adventures were supposed to have taken place. While the Avengers tale takes place in 1873, and that is plausible, there are enough anachronisms scattered throughout the Western sagas to make the Kids very hard to pin down. In **Two-Gun Kid** #75, Matt Hawk even shows up at the battle of the Alamo which took place in **1836**. Oh well, most of the stories seem to be post-Civil War at least, so most of the Kids can be safely placed in their cradles in the 1840's and 1850's.

Also subject to vagueness are Marvel's World War I vintage heroes, the Phantom Eagle and the original Union Jack. It's not very clear just when they jumped into the war or how old they were when they started their careers, though they seem to have been out of their teens, so we assume they belong to the late 1880's or early 1890's. In the same vicinity must belong Doc Savage's fabulous five comrades: Monk Mayfair, Ham Brooks, Johnny, Rennie and Long Tom. All served in World War I, and though doubtless their renowned bravery and prodigious talents could have earned them battlefield commissions, **Major** Tom Roberts, **Lt. Col.** Andrew Mayfair, **Col.** John Renwick and **Brig. Gen.** [!!] Theodore Brooks must have had considerable military backgrounds before the war. Doc Savage himself, we place in 1901, following the lead of his most eminent biographer, Mr. Philip Jose Farmer.

The Yellow Claw was, admittedly, a marginal qualifier for our list since his series didn't belong to the Marvel Age proper, but we figured he deserved some consideration as the first Marvel villain to have his own series. He got dated by his apparent age in his appearance in **Invaders** #41. Sherlock Holmes has even less of an overt claim to being in the Marvel Universe, but since the Master Detective truly lives in "any" well-run universe, we deemed his inclusion appropriate. The year 1854 is taken from Mr. Holmes's foremost biographer, the late William S. Baring-Gould.

ALRIGHT, BIG MOUTH, YOU'VE HAD YOUR FUN! THE PARTY'S OVER NOW!
AWRK! BEAT IT, PRIVATE! I GOT ME A BETTER PIGEON HERE NOW!
NICHOLAS! YOU PROMISED YOU'D GET IN TO NO MORE FIGHTS!
THIS WON'T BE A FIGHT, BABY! IT'LL BE A MASSACRE!
I APOLOGIZE FOR THIS UNGEEMLY DISTURBANCE, BABY--BUT I GOT ME A LITTLE BUSINESS MATTER TO ATTEND TO! SO, BY YOUR LEAVE--!
KAROOSH
OH DEAR...!

"The Greatest Heroes of World War II ... and others": As we get past the turn of the century, we start running into more characters who are still alive and kicking. Isaac [Gargoyle] Christians, Marvel's first character to "begin" a super-hero career in his seventies, was shown in **Defenders** #100 to have fought in World War I. We assume that he went to war in 1917, at 16 or 17, and so place him in 1900. May Parker looks as though she's been around since the time of King Kull, but since she's shown to have been a "flapper" in her younger days in her "photo album" in **Spectacular Spider-Man Annual** #3, we opted for something just on the far side of 1910. Her former fellow resident at the Restwell Nursing Home, Dominic Fortune, belongs to the same period. In his previous appearances, Dom was set in the late 1930's, and appeared to be in his late twenties or so. So we considered the reference in **Marvel Team-Up** #120 to his being 70 in 1982, as reasonable, thus dating him in 1912.

Now we come to those characters who are dated by their participation in World War II. The earliest of these is Capt. Simon Savage, first seen as "The Skipper", piloting his sub to provide transportation for Sgt. Fury and the Howling Commandoes. Later he got a bunch of "Leatherneck Raiders" of his very own to command. Following the principle that Marvel characters tend to be prodigiously young, we figured he'd just turned thirty as the U.S. got into the war and planted him in 1912. We admit that it's not at all unreasonable that he was born earlier still. The Red Skull is assigned to 1914, on the basis of his origin in **Tales of Suspense** #66, in which he appears to be a young man, but not a teenager when he meets Hitler before the outbreak of World War II.

Nick Fury gets assigned to 1919, largely on the basis of two stories. Twenty-three may seem rather precocious for Fury to be a sergeant leading the Howling Commandoes in 1942, but the origin of the Howlers in **Sgt. Fury** #34 depicts Nick in England in 1940, training paratroopers "only a few months" after he had begun parachute diving himself. Indications throughout the story are that Fury is a young man who is tough as nails thanks to his hard youth in New York City. And then there's **Sgt. Fury** #76 in which we see Fury's father fighting the Red Baron in flashback. It is clearly indicated that the elder Fury did not marry until after World War I. We might have been able to date the rest of the Howlers, but information on most of them is rather vague. Dum Dum Dugan was clearly the oldest and Junior Juniper the youngest, but we'll leave it to those more expert in war-mags to be more specific.

1919 also sees the "debut" of some of the super-heroes of World War II. The lesser heroes of the period, like the Liberty Legionaires, are described in rather skimpy detail. In this case, we're forced to fall back on their apparent appearances and what we know of their educational backgrounds. So the scientists of the group [Thin Man and Blue Diamond] are assumed to be just out of college in 1942, i.e., born in 1919. The others - Red Raven, Patriot, Whizzer and Miss America - trail along in the next few years. Far easier to date are the Big Three of the Invaders. The android Human Torch is, of course, easy since he's created on-panel in **Marvel Comics** #1 in 1939. The Sub-Mariner is almost as easy since in the self-same comic, Namor's mom, Princess Fen, says

that she met Leonard McKenzie in 1920. Given that their romance was **very** short-lived, odds are that Prince Namor was born in 1921. Captain America is a bit less certain. In various retellings of his origin, Steve Rogers is either 18 or 20 in 1941, when the U.S. Government picks him to be the first human recipient of the Super-Soldier serum. We opted for 20, and so Steve was born in 1921. While we're at it, mention should be made of their British compatriots, Spitfire and Union Jack II. Both were evidently born after their dad, Lord Falsworth, got back from World War I; both are young, but not teen-agers. Spitfire being the older of the two, she was dated to 1921, and her brother (along with his good friend and classmate, Roger Aubrey, who became Dyna-Mite and the Destroyer) a year later in 1922.

Also dating from this period are a couple of members of the Fantastic Four and a couple of their oldest foes. Reed Richards and Ben Grimm both fought in World War II. Indeed, both appeared in Marvel war mags: Reed as an agent of the OSS in **Sgt. Fury** #3 and Ben as a flying ace in **Capt. Savage** #7. Moreover, the two of them must have graduated from college before the war as well. Not only is Ben Grimm clearly fresh out of high school when he and Reed become roomies (he's referred to as the famous All-American, not the famous war hero), but we also know that Victor von Doom had his unfortunate accident before the war, courtesy of his appearance in **Invaders** #32-33. So the senior members must have at least begun college before they entered the war. And Reed, at least, entered the war early - since his guest appearance with the Howlers took place while Junior Juniper was still alive. Now Reed, being brilliant, might have entered college at a precocious age. But he's always appeared at least as old as his fellow freshman, Ben Grimm, and athletes on football scholarships do not enter college early; they need their physical maturity. So we assume they were of the same age, entering the war in 1942, just after graduating from college. Therefore, 1920. We arbitrarily place Victor von Doom one year earlier. On the one hand, von Doom is manifestly brilliant enough to have won entrance to good old Empire State University at quite an early age - it would have taken some time for his scientific fame to spread far enough to draw a college recruiter all the way to Eastern Europe. Since Reed didn't remark on Doom being particularly old or young when they first met, we opted for making Doom just a year older. The Puppet Master pops up in the same temporal neighborhood by virtue of being old enough to be the father of the lovely Alicia who is probably in her early twenties when we first meet the two of them in 1962. Makes Ben Grimm somewhat of a cradle robber, doesn't it?

While we're discussing cradle robbers, we may as well skip ahead and discuss the rest of the Fantastic Four. Johnny Storm is clearly supposed to be the same age as Peter Parker (both were entering college at the same time, see **FF** #35). We placed both of them in 1945, so that Johnny was 16 when he burst into flame in 1961. That wasn't hard. But Sue is a different problem. On the one hand, she has a brother born in 1945. On the other, her husband was born in 1920. Either Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Storm had really strange ideas about how to space their family or there was something a trifle odd going on between "childhood sweethearts" Sue Storm

MARVEL CHARACTER CHRONOLOGY

Year or Era	Character(s)	Debut Issue
Indeterminate due to lack of connection with Marvel Universe	*Star Wars* cast	*Star Wars* #1
	Star Trek cast	*Star Trek* #1
	Battlestar Galactica	*Battlestar Galactica* #1
	Mark Harris	*Man from Atlantis* #1
	Gullivar Jones	*Creatures on the Loose* #16
	Paradox	*Marvel Preview* #24
	Seeker 3000 crew	*Marvel Premiere* #41
	Monark Star-Stalker	*Marvel Premiere* #32
	Star-Lord	*Marvel Preview* #4
	Logan-5	*Logan's Run* #1
	Thongor	*Creatures on the Loose* #24
	Brak the Barbarian	*Chamber of Chills* #2
	Bront	*Savage Sword of Conan* #65
	Chane	*Savage Sword of Conan* #63
	Tyndall of Klarn	*Marvel Super Action* #1 (b&w)
	Blackmark	*Savage Sword of Conan* #1
	Bucky Bizarre	*Bizarre Adventures* #28
	Alice Cooper	*Marvel Premiere* #50
	etc., etc., etc.	
	***	
Indeterminate due to alien life spans, time travel, space travel, etc.	Aquarian (Wundarr)	*Fear* #17
	Clea	*Strange Tales* #126
	Jack Frost	(Timely) *USA* #1
		(Marvel) *Marvel Premiere* #23
	Godzilla	*Godzilla* #1
	Howard the Duck	*Fear* #19
	Hyperion	*Avengers* #69-70
	Ikaris & Eternals	*Eternals* #1
	Impossible Man	*Fantastic Four* #11
	The Inhumans	(Medusa) *FF* 36
		(others) *FF* #44-46
	Mar-Vell	*Marvel Super-Heroes* #12
	The Micronauts	*Micronauts* #1, etc.
	Omega (& J. M. Starling)	*Omega* #1
	Rom	*ROM* #1

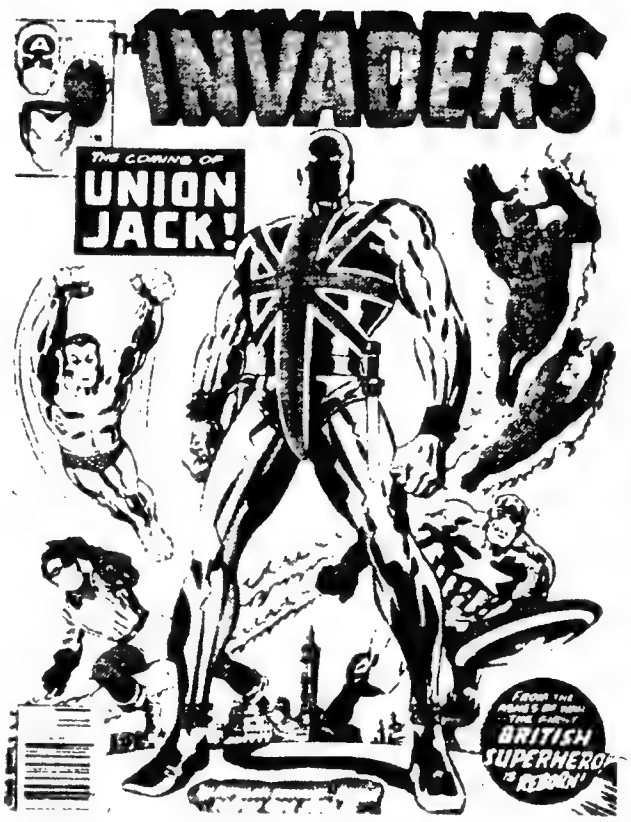
and Reed Richards. Well, we decided to split the difference and place Sue in 1933, making her 28 when she debuted. Probably Reed babysat for the Storms when he was in high school and probably little Sue had a crush on the handsome teenager. By the time Reed got back from the war and getting his doctorate and doing some post-doctoral work, say in 1952, the little girl had grown up! You might suppose that the Storms would object to their daughter hanging around with a man almost twice her age, but we know from Franklin Storm's reappearance in **FF** that he hadn't seen his children in some years, so Sue may not have had to worry about parental displeasure. By the time Reed and Sue got married in 1965, he was 45 and she was 32 and the age difference no longer seemed so important.

THE
10¢
Fantastic Four
THEY HAD TAKEN A DEADLY OATH TO DESTROY THE FANTASTIC FOUR!!
THEY WERE MIRACLES! THEY WERE HUMAN! THEY HAD POWERS FAR GREATER THAN EARTHMEN! THEY WERE
"SKRULLS FROM OUTER SPACE!"
JAN

Heroes of the Sixties: Avengers, Defenders and Friends: The first of the characters unconnected with World War II is also, by some reckoning, the first hero of the Marvel Age: Dr. Anthony Druid [formerly known as Dr. Droom]. Both he and his more renowned collegue in medicine and mysticism, Dr. Stephen Strange, get dated fairly early [1921 and 1922, respectively] since becoming an M.D. is a time-consuming procedure. Stephen Strange, in particular, before we met him in 1963, must have [a] gotten his M.D., [b] become a wealthy and famous surgeon, [c] had his accident and spent some time as a derelict, [d] sought out the Ancient One and studied long enough to become a Master of the Mystic Arts. Assuming that he was only 41 at the time is giving a fairly generous interpretation of Dr. Strange's natural brilliance at both surgery and sorcery.

Similarly, scientists Michael Morbius, Henry Pym and Bruce Banner all had to rack up their Ph.D's before we first met them and had gained a certain degree of renown in their respective fields. Morbius is dated earlier than the other two despite his later debut both

Year or Era	Character[s]	Debut Issue
	Scarecrow	*Dead of Night* #11
	Silver Surfer	*Fantastic Four* #48
	Starhawk	*Defenders* #27
	Venus	(Atlas) *Venus* #1 (Marvel) *Sub-Mariner* #57
	Watcher	*Fantastic Four* #12
	Prince Wayfarer	*Marvel Preview* #4
	Thundra & Femizons	*FF* #129, *Savage Tales* #1
	***	
Indeterminate by definition...	Captain Universe	*Micronauts* #8
	***	
An eternal verity!	Forbush-Man	*Not Brand Ecch* #1
1) Thurian Age	King Kull	*Creatures on the Loose* #10
2) Atlantean Age	Kamuu & Zartra	*Sub-Mariner* #62
3) Hyborian Age	Conan	*Conan* #1
	Red Sonja	*Conan* #23
	Valeria	*Savage Tales* #2
4) circa 10,000 BC	Ulysses Bloodstone	*Marvel Presents* #1
5) Classical Period	N'kantu, Living Mummy	*Supernatural Thrillers* #5
	Hercules	*Journey into Mys. Ann.* #1
6) 1st Cen. BC	Bran Mak Morn	*Savage Sword of Conan* #16
7) 1st Cen. AD	Thor	*Journey into Mystery* #83
	Warriors Three	*Journey into Mystery* #119
	Valkyrie (Brunnhilde)	*Ave.* #83, *Hulk* #142, *Def.* #4
8) Arthurian Britain	Black Knight I (Percy of Scandia)	(Atlas) *Black Knight* #1 (Marvel) *M. Super-Heroes* #17
	Modred the Mystic	*Marvel Chillers* #1
9) Early 1400's	Vlad (Dracula) Tepes	*Tomb of Dracula* #1
	Lilith	*Giant-Size Chillers* #1
10) Mid-1500's	Solomon Kane	*Monsters Unleashed* #1
	The Golem	*Strange Tales* #174
11) Before 1818	Frankenstein's Monster	*Frankenstein* #1



because of his physical appearance at the time and because he is less super-brilliant than Drs. Banner and Pym. John Jameson is an interesting problem. He gets dated as early as he did by virtue of being a Mercury astronaut and a colonel. None of the early astronauts [Shepard, Glenn, etc.] were younger than 35. Becoming a colonel [outside of wartime] takes time too. So putting Jonah's pride and joy in 1928, is being fairly generous. Consider now, if you will, how old J. Jonah Jameson must be today! [We get some confirmation of Jonah's longevity from the fact that reproductions of the headlines of Captain America's "death" in 1945, indicate that Jonah was editor of the paper back then. Jonah is obviously just too stubborn and crusty to let age bother him!]

Also right in this period are a couple of Fifties vintage characters: Marvel Boy and the 3-D Man. Marvel Boy debuted in 1950, and was apparently in his latter teens , so 1933 seemed appropriate. The tales of the 3-D Man couldn't have taken place any earlier than 1953, since that's when the 3-D craze took hold. In fact, they are dated in 1958, in **Marvel Premiere** #36, despite possible anachronisms caused by the "1950's Avengers" issue of **What If?**. Making Chuck Chandler a top test pilot at the age of 26 is being quite generous.

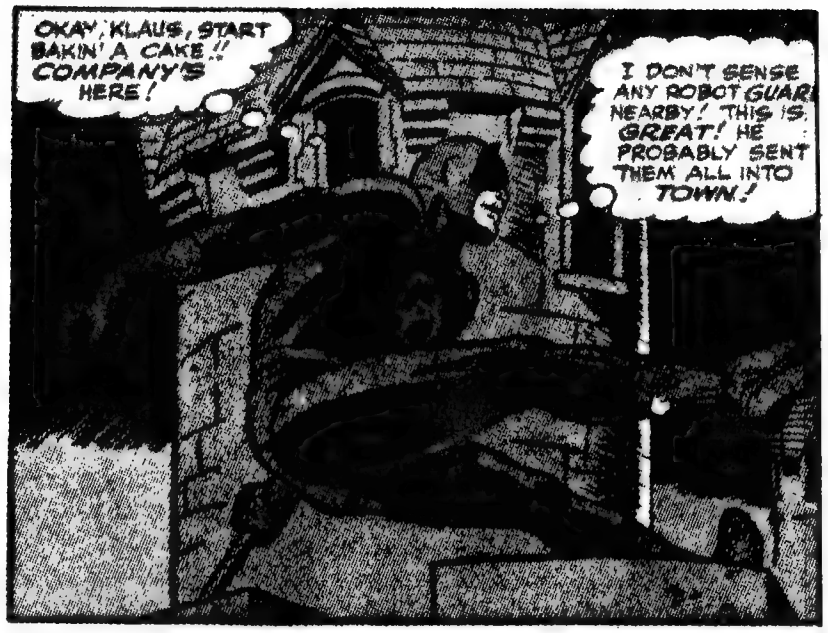
A whole flock of Avengers come into the world in the Thirties and Forties. Tony Stark may be a tad younger than we dated him. He did, after all, inherit the foundations of his industrial empire from his father. Given his own natural acumen, he might have been younger than the 30 we postulate when he went off to demonstrate his transistor technology in Vietnam. The Swordsman turns up then as well since he's clearly several years older than the young [but not teenaged] Hawkeye, when they met at the circus back in '63 or '64. Simon Williams, also an industrialist, debuted a couple of years after Tony Stark, so we made him a couple of years younger. He too may be older than that. The Black Panther we dated in 1939, from several clues. His first encounter with Klaw occurred when he was a child, but he is clearly no teen-ager when he meets the FF in **FF** #52

Year or Era	Character[s]	Debut Issue
12) 1840's or 50's	Western Heroes:	
	Ghost Rider I	*Ghost Rider* #1
	orig. Red Wolf	*Red Wolf* #1
	Two-Gun Kid	
	Rawhide Kid	
	Kid Colt	
	Ringo Kid, etc.	
13) 1854	Sherlock Holmes	*Marvel Preview* #5
14) 1880's & 90's	Yellow Claw	(Atlas) *Yellow Claw* #1 (Marvel) *Str. T.* #161, *Cap* #164
	Lord James (Union Jack I)	*Invaders* #7
	Falsworth	
	Kurt (Phantom Eagle)	*Marvel Super-Heroes* #16
	Kaufman	*Doc Savage* #1 (color)
	Doc Savage's crew	
1889	Adolf (Hate-Monger)	*Fantastic Four* #21
	Hitler	
15) 1900	Isaac (Gargoyle)	*Defenders* #94
	Christians	
16) 1901	Dr. Clark Savage Jr.	*Doc Savage* #1 (color)
17) 1907	May Parker	*Amazing Fantasy* #15
18) 1912	David (Dominic Fortune)	*Marvel Super-Action* #1 b&w
	Fortunoff	
	Capt. Simon Savage	*Sgt. Fury* #??
19) 1914	The Red Skull	(Timely) *Cap. America* #1 (Marvel) *T. of Susp.* #66
20) 1919	Logan (Wolverine)	*Hulk* #180
	Dr. Victor von Doom	*Fantastic Four*
	Bruce (Thin Man) Dickson	(Timely) *Mystic* #4
		(Marvel) *M. Premiere* #29
	Elton (Blue Diamond)	(Timely) *Daring Mystery* #7
	Morrow	(Marvel) *M. Premiere* #29
	Nicholas Fury	*Sgt. Fury* #1
21) 1920	Reed (Mr. fantastic)	*Fantastic Four* #1
	Richards	
	Ben (Thing) Grimm	*Fantastic Four* #1
	Red Raven	(Timely) *Red Raven* #1
		(Marvel) *X-Men* #44
	Phillip (Puppet Master)	*Fantastic Four* #8
	Masters	
22) 1921	Prince Namor McKenzie	(Timely) *Marvel Comics* #1
		(Marvel) *FF* #4

Further, in **Avengers Special** #2, T'Challa remarks to Hawkeye that they were both alive in 1945, when they had gone back in time to observe the death of Bucky, "even if we were but children". Hawkeye himself got placed in 1942, figuring that he was in his early twenties when he dared take on the Invincible Iron Man for the love of the Black Widow. Speaking of Madame Natasha, we assume a bit of precocity for her spy career. In **Daredevil** #88, her old friend and confidant, Ivan, relates how he rescued her from a burning building at the siege of Stalingrad. Since that event definitely took place in late 1942, and little Tasha appeared to be about five at the time, we put her in 1937 [coincidentally halfway between Tony Stark and Matt Murdock!]. Being a super-spy with the ear of Nikita Khrushehev himself at age 26 is quite a feat, but not implausible for one of the Widow's talents. Janet Van Dyne is one with a touch of solid evidence to go by. In **Avengers** #4, Jan comes into her inheritance on her 23rd birthday. That would make her 19 in 1963, when she first appeared - not unreasonable. Therefore, 1944. We presume that Dr. Dane Whitman became the Black Knight just shortly after winning his doctorate at the age of 26, therefore, 1941 for him. The Avenger in this general clutch who's likely to provoke the most controversy is Carol Danvers. She was security chief at the Cape in 1968. We're putting her birthdate in 1942. That is admittedly quite young. However, we know that Carol joined the Air Force at age 18 and that after basic training, she went into intelligence, serving with Col. Mike Rossi. Like all Claremont females, she was really, really good at what she did. If she'd had a very successful espionage career for five or six years, it's not unreasonable that NASA would have considered her suitable for the job. Of course, given her track record with Captain Mar-Vell, they were proven wrong, but what the hey?

Around the beginning of the forties, there's a whole string of second-string Marvel super-doers who we dated by using their educational backgrounds. Bill Foster, Walter Newell, Ted Sallis, Leonard Samson, Tanya Belinsky and Jericho Drumm were all doctors of philosopy or medical doctors, and so all had to be at least in their mid-twenties when they first appeared. Shanna O'Hara, too, is dated by this method. In **Shanna** #5, Prof. Xavier refers to meeting Shanna at a seminar in 1969. Shanna must have had her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine at that time. We assumed she was probably there reporting on her thesis work and so was 26 or so. Brock [Torpedo] Jones had to have time to go to college and have a pro football career before retiring to sell insurance and become a super-hero so we assumed he was in his mid-thirties at debut.

Year or Era	Character[s]	Debut Issue
	Steven (Captain America) Rogers	(Timely) *Cap. America* #1 (Marvel) *Avengers* #4
	Dr. Anthony Druid	*Amazing Adventures* #1
	Jack (Drax the Destroyer) Douglas	*Iron Man* #58
	Jacqueline (Spitfire) Falsworth	*Invaders* #7
	Jeff (Patriot, Cap III)	(Timely) *Human Torch* #1
	Mace	(Marvel) *M. Premiere* #29
23) 1922	Brian (Union Jack II) Falswoth	*Invaders* #18
	Roger (Destroyer) Aubrey	*Invaders* #14
	Dr. Stephen Strange	*Strange Tales* #110
	Robert (Whizzer) Frank	(Timely) *USA*#1 (Marvel) *Giant-Size Aven.* #1
24) 1923	Simon (Zombie) Garth	*Tales of the Zombie* #1
	Madeleine (Miss America)	(Timely) *Marvel Mystery* #49
	Joyce	(Marvel) *G-S Avengers* #1
25) 1925	Namora	(Timely) *Marvel Mystery* #82 (Marvel) *Sub-Mariner* #50
26) 1926	John (Man-Wolf) Jameson	*Spiderman* #1, 124
	Edwin Jarvis	*Tales of Suspense* #59
	Magnus (Magneto)	*X-Men* #1
27) 1928	James Buchanan (Bucky) Barnes	(Timely) *Cap. Amer.* #1 (Marvel) *Avengers* #4
	Toro Raymond	(Timely) *Human Torch* #1 (Marvel) *Sub-Mariner* #14
28) 1929	Jessica (Spider-Woman) Drew	*Marvel Spotlight* #32
29) 1930	Michael Morbius	*Spiderman* #101
30) 1932	Robert Bruce (Hulk) Banner	*Hulk* #1
	Henry (Yellowjacket) Pym	*Tales to Astonish* #27,34
	Chuck (3-D Man) Chandler	*Marvel Premiere* #35
31) 1933	Sue (Invisible Girl) Storm Richards	*Fantastic Four* #1
	Tony (Iron Man) Stark	*Tales of Suspense* #39


OKAY, KLAUS, START BAKIN' A CAKE!! COMPANY'S HERE!
I DON'T SENSE ANY ROBOT GUARD NEARBY! THIS IS GREAT! HE PROBABLY SENT THEM ALL INTO TOWN!

Matt Murdock is on the one hand one of the best documented of the Marvel heroes, and on the other, one requiring the biggest assumptions of precocity. In **Daredevil** #1, one of the captions clearly states that Matt was eight years old in 1950. Ergo, Matt was born in 1942. But that means that Matt had passed his bar exams at the age of 22! Not bad for a blind man! Oh well, there's no arguing with Stan's own words in the character's very first appearance. Logically, this also enables us to date Elektra Natchios. Elektra was probably an undergrad while Matt was a law student, but since he was clearly ahead of his time, she was probably only a year younger than he.

Kevin Plunder was placed in 1942, somewhat on the strength of his later appearances rather than his debut in **X-Men** #10. The way Jack Kirby drew him in that issue, he **might** have been a teenager. The X-Men made no remarks to that effect and since he seems rather more mature in his subsequent **Daredevil** appearances, we decided to make him 22 at debut. The history of Marc Spector is far harder to decipher. We ended up putting him in 1944, making him 22 when he first challenged the Werewolf. If anyone can come up with a more tightly reasoned version of this perplexing split-personality, we'd be glad to see it. That little devil, Daimon Hellstrom was assigned to 1942, in order to give him time to be a student for the priesthood before he turned to his career as exorcist and super-hero. Satana Hellstrom was stated in **Marvel Spotlight** #12 to be three years younger than her brother.

Spider-Man, the X-Men and other "Young Heroes": Fortunately for the mental health and well-being of Marvel scholars, Marvel's foremost super-star is quite easy to place. Peter Parker is in high school when we meet him and is there for a couple years before he graduates. We made Pete 17 in 1962, the same age as the Human Torch. No problem, right? Similarly, the original X-Men aren't too much of a problem. Bobby Drake is clearly the youngest of the group, all of whom are teen-agers when we meet them in **X-Men** #1. Bobby celebrates his eighteenth birthday in **X-Men** #32. Hank McCoy is definitely the oldest. So after a bit of figuring, we made Bobby 16 in 1963, Hank [who's still in high school in his orgin] 18, and Scott, Warren and Jean are all 17.

Year or Era	Character[s]	Debut Issue
	Robert (Marvel Boy)	(Atlas) *Marvel Boy* #1
	Grayson	(Marvel) *Fantastic Four* #164
	The Swordsman	*Avengers* #19
	William "Flint" (Sandman)	*Spiderman* #4
	Marko	
32) 1934	Prof. Charles Xavier	*X-Men* #1
	Sean (Banshee) Cassidy	*X-Men* #28
33) 1935	Simon (Wonder Man) Williams	*Avengers* #9
34) 1937	Natasha (Black Widow) Romanova	*Tales of Suspense* #52
35) 1938	Bill (Giant-Man II) Foster	*Avengers* #32, *Power Man* #34
	The Punisher	*Spiderman* #129
	Walter (Stingray) Newell	*Tales to Astonish* #95, *Sub* #19
36) 1939	Original Human Torch	(Timely) *Marvel Comics* #1 (Marvel) *FF Annual* #4
	T'Challa (Black Panther)	*Fantastic Four* #52
37) 1940	Ted (Man-Thing) Sallis	*Savage Tales* #1
	Leonard (Doc) Samson	*Hulk* #141
38) 1941	Tanya (Red Guardian II) Belinsky	*Defenders* #35
	Dane (Black Knight)	*Avengers* #47,48
	Jericho (Brother Voodoo) Drumm	*Strange Tales* #169
	Hal (3-D Man) Chandler	*Marvel Premiere* #35
39) 1942	Matt (Daredevil) Murdock	*Daredevil* #1
	Clint (Hawkeye) Barton	*Tales of Suspense* #57
	Kevin (Ka-Zar) Plunder	*X-Men* #10
	Carol (Ms. Marvel) Danvers	*MSH* #13, *Ms. Marvel* #1
	Brock (Torpedo) Jones	*Daredevil*
	Daimon Hellstrom	*Marvel Spotlight* #12
40) 1943	Shanna (She-Devil) O'Hara	*Shanna the She-Devil* #1
	Blade	*Tomb of Dracula* #10
41) 1944	Will (Red Wolf) Talltrees	*Avengers* #80
	Bobbi (Mockingbird) Morse	*Aston. Tales* #16
	Marc (Moon Knight) Spector	*Werewolf by Night* #32
	Elektra Natchios	*Daredevil* #168

Professor X is also fairly well documented in his origin in **X-Men** #12. While his birthdate isn't given, it is noted that his father died in an atomic test at Alamogordo, at which time little Charlie appears to be about 12. He then was in college before he went to Korea, where his stepbrother, Cain Marko, became the unstoppable Juggernaut. The atomic test could not have occurred before 1945, but that would seemingly make Xavier only 18 or 19 when he was in grad school and the Korean police action intervened. Well, that's not hard to account for, given Xavier's intellect and telepathic powers. Someone who can absorb knowledge directly from his teacher's minds should have no problem whizzing through high school and college. We date the Banshee to the same year, 1933, on the basis of his apparently extensive pre-X-Men career with Interpol, and the professor's remark from **X-Men** #94 that "you're no older than I am". Sunfire, the other "old-new" X-Man, may be fairly accurately dated by the fact that he was conceived in the aftermath of the Hiroshima blast ... therefore, born in 1946. When we first meet Alex Summers in 1968, he's in college, younger than Scott, but not by much; so we dated him in 1948, and more arbitrarily, Lorna Dane as well.

As for the new X-Men, Storm is the one we have the most circumstantial evidence for. Her parents died in Cairo in a bombing attack when she was a few years old. Moreover, this was only a few years after Xavier returned from Korea. Therefore, her parents must have died in the 1956 Suez war and assuming Ororo was five at the time, she was born in 1951, making her 24 when she first appears in **Giant-Size X-Men** #1. Nightcrawler and Colossus are more vaguely placed. Kurt seems to have remained with the gypsy tribe of Margali Szardos into his late teens, followed by some time with the circus. We placed him at 22 in 1975, and Peter, clearly youngest of the group, at 18 with the late Thunderbird in between at 21. Any of these three might have been younger than they seemed to us. Since they all led somewhat harder lives than your average middle-class American, they would have matured faster mentally. If anyone wishes to offer argument or evidence, we'd be glad to hear it. As for Wolverine, he's rather a special case. We dated him way back in 1919, on the basis of a remark by John Byrne while he was still with the X-Men. Byrne said that Wolverine's amazing healing and recuperative powers cause him to age very slowly. They are a dominant genetic characteristic which Logan shares with his father, the villain Sabre-Tooth. The year 1919, was given by Byrne. He also mentioned that he and Roger Stern [then working on **Captain America**] intended to do a cross-over story with the X-Men in which Cap

Year or Era	Character[s]	Debut Issue
	Janet (Wasp) Van Dyne	*Tales to Astonish* #44
42) 1945	Peter (Spiderman) Parker	*Amazing Fantasy* #15
	John (Human Torch) Storm	*Fantastic Four* #1
	Henry (Beast) McCoy	*X-Men* #1
	James McDonald (Vindicator) Hudson	*X-Men* #109
	Satana Hellstrom	*Vampire Tales* #2
43) 1946	Scott (Cyclops) Summers	*X-Men* #1
	Jean (Marvel Girl) Grey	*X-Men* #1
	Warren (Angel) Worthington	*X-Men* #1
	Pietro (Quicksilver) Frank	*X-Men* #4
	Wanda (Scarlet Witch) Frank	*X-Men* #4
	Shiro (Sunfire) Yoshida	*X-Men* #64
	James (Skull the Slayer) Scully	*Skull the Slayer* #1
	Luke Cage	*Hero for Hire* #1
	Misty Knight	*Marvel Premiere* #21
	Rick Jones	*Hulk* #1
	Eric Simon (Devil-Slayer) Payne	*Marvel Spotlight* #33
44) 1947	Bobby (Iceman) Drake	*X-Men* #1
45) 1948	Alex (Havok) Summers	*X-Men* #54
	Lorna (Polaris) Dane	*X-Men* #49
	Patsy (Hellcat) Walker	*FF Annual* #3
	Walter (Sasquatch) Langkowski	*X-Men* #120
46) 1949	Lin Sun	*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #1
	Bob Diamond	*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #1
	Abe Brown	*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #1
	Colleen Wing	*Marvel Premiere* #19
	The Shroud	*Super-Villain Team-Up* #5
47) 1950	Sam (Falcon) Wilson	*Captain America* #117
	Scott (Ant-Man) Lang	*Marvel Premiere* #47
	Heather (Moondragon) Douglas	*Iron Man* #54
	Greer (Cat/Tigra) Grant Nelson	*The Cat* #1
1951	Ororo (Storm) Munroe	*Giant-Size*
48) 1952	Daniel (Iron Fist) Rand	*Marvel Premiere* #15

recognizes Logan as a corporal he'd met during WWII. However, since Byrne's departure from the books in question, there has been no revelation about Wolverine's age. Given his surprisingly wide range of talents, it does seem likely that he is older than he looks. And in the "Future X-Men" sequence in #141-142, Logan appears far better preserved than his teammates. We will, therefore, stick with Byrne's date until the comics establish otherwise.

Long about this time we run into a host of heroes born of the martial-arts craze in the literary sense. Physically oldest of the group seem to be the Sons of the Tiger. We have little specific evidence for them, but none of them are teenagers when we meet them. We rather arbitrarily said they were all 25 in 1974, though if you really believe that Bob Diamond managed to garner two Oscars (as asserted in a recent **PM/IF**) then he may be older than that. Danny Rand we placed at 20 in his debut. This was helped by the fact that Kun-Lun only manifests itself on Earth once every 10 years. Danny was born on Earth shortly after his father arrived there and Danny and his mother returned to Kun-Lun at the next opportunity - with her dying in the process. Danny returned to Earth on the following opening when we met him in **Marvel Premiere** #15. Less evidence is available for Shang-Chi, but he seems rather youthful to begin with - we opted for 18 in his first appearance in 1973, so the same goes for his fellow student at Fu Manchu's retreat, Midnight. Hector Ayala seemed a bit older at his debut, but it came two years later, so we dated him to the same year. His later co-star, the Jack of Hearts, was placed in 1953, again on the basis of apparent age.

There was fairly specific evidence for a pair of would-be Celestial Madonnas. In the "origin" sequence in **Giant-Size Avengers** #4, Mantis was said to have been born and Moondragon taken off to Titan at the same time in 1953. But Moondragon appeared to be several years old at the time. When was she born? Well, in **Daredevil** #105, she says she was born in the 1950's. Between the two, it seems most likely that she was born in 1950, and that she was a toddler of three when picked up by Mentor in 1953. By the by, that's how we dated her dad, Drax the Destroyer, back to 1921. He looked to be in his thirties or so in the Starlin version of the origin sequence in **Daredevil**.

Marvel's second black super-doer, the Falcon, can be dated with some accuracy thanks to the "real origin of the Falcon" from **Captain America** #183. Therein,

Year or Era	Character[s]	Debut Issue
48) 1952	Barbara ("Valkyrie")	*Hulk* #126, *Defenders* #4
	Denton Norriss	
	Johnny (Ghost Rider) Blaze	*Marvel Spotlight* #5
	Jennifer (She-Hulk) Walters	*She-Hulk* #1
	Dr. Michael (Shaman) Twoyoungmen	*X-Men* #120
49) 1953	Jack (of Hearts) Hart	*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #22
	Kurt (Nightcrawler) Wagner	*Giant-Size X-Men* #1
	Mantis	*Avengers* #112
50) 1954	John (Thunderbird) Proudstar	*Giant-Size X-Men* #1
	Jack (Werewolf) Russell	*Marvel Spotlight* #2
	Jean-Paul (Northstar) Beaubier	*X-Men* #120
	Jeanne-Marie (Aurora) Beaubier	*X-Men* #120
51) 1955	Shang-Chi	*Special Marvel Edition* #15
	M'nai (Midnight)	*Special Marvel Edition* #16
	Hector (White Tiger) Ayala	*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #19
52) 1956	Wendell (Quasar) Vaughn	*Captain America* #217
	Brian (Capt. Britain) Braddock	*Captain Britain* #1
	Jason (American Eagle) Strongbow	*Marvel 2-in-1 Annual* #6
53) 1957	Peter (Colossus) Rasputin	*Giant-Size X-Men* #1
	Allison (Dazzler) Blaire	*X-Men* #130
	Anne (Snowbird) McKenzie	*X-Men* #120
54) 1960	Richard (Nova) Ryder	*Nova* #1
	Laynia (Darkstar) Petrovna	*Champions* #7
1964	Vance Astro	*Marvel Super-Heroes* #18
55) 1966	Catherine (Sprite) Pryde	*X-Men* #129
56) 1967	Him/Adam Warlock	*Fantastic Four* #67
57) 1968	The Vision	*Avengers* #57
58) 1977	Machine Man	*2001* #8
	Jocasta	*Avengers* #162
Approximates:		
59) circa 1950's	Luther (Deathlok) Manning	*Astonishing Tales* #25

"Snap" Wilson is revealed to have joined the Los Angeles mob at the age of 18 and some time thereafter was sent on the fateful flight to South America that led to his encounter with Cap on Exile Island in 1969. We estimate that he was in LA for two years before meeting Cap, therefore, he was born in 1949 or 50 ... we opted for 1950. Luke Cage, on the other hand, seemed to have been around a while longer when he appeared in 1972, so we opted for 1946 for him and for Misty Knight as well, who seems to have been a policewoman for several years before her arm was lost. Note that Marvel time slippage becomes really evident for heroes in this group. The ever-young Spider-Man doesn't look older than Luke or Misty these days, but that's inevitable when characters debut over a decade apart.

Diverse and sundry lesser characters: Rick Jones, especially in **FF** #11, seemed to be about the same age as the Torch so we plonked him just a year later. Skull the Slayer and Devil-Slayer arrive at the same time by virtue of being Vietnam vets, presumably about draft age when they entered. Johnny Blaze, the Ghost Rider, is fairly well placed in his debut issue - at the age of 10 his father died, at 15 Roxane Simpson's mother died and made him promise not to join the cycle show, at 20 he began practicing in secret. We assumed he was a quick study and dated his birth in 1952, leading to his debut in 1972. Far more solid dating may be given to the Werewolf. Jack Russell had his fateful 18th birthday in the pages of **Spotlight** #2 at the beginning of 1972, ergo born 1954.

On the distaff side, Tigra, formerly the Cat, formerly Greer Grant Nelson, reveals in a flashback in **The Cat** #1 that she was in her first year of college two years before the origin of the Cat. Assume, therefore, that she was 20 at the debut and thus born in 1950. Her counterpart, Patsy Walker, is a more challenging problem since if one goes by her own romance magazine, Patsy was a teenager in 1947. We chose to date her from her first authenticated Marvel Universe appearance, namely in the crowd scene at the wedding of Reed and Sue Richards in **FF Annual** #3. If she was an effervescent 17 then, she must have been born in 1948. Since then, it's been revealed [sort of] in the pages of the **Defenders** book that her own magazine was, in part, based on her mother's fantasy version of Patsy's life, started when she was just a child. Jennifer Walters was dated by the fact that she is a practicing lawyer in **She-Hulk** #1. Since there's no need to assume that Jen is as brilliant as Matt Murdock, we assumed she was about 27 at the time. Alison Blaire, on the other hand, was just getting ready to enter law school when she opted for a singing career, so she was probably a new-minted college grad in Dazzler #1 - call her 22 and her birth year 1957.

By the time we get to heroes younger than the Dazzler, we've actually seen most of them born. That's not quite true of Nova and Darkstar, both of whom were apparently 16 when they appeared back in 1976, or for that matter of Kitty Pryde, but since she was definitely 13 ½ when we met her, she can be accurately placed. Vance Astro is declared to be 16 in 1980, in **Marvel Two-in-One** #69, so we went with that, even though the origin of the Guardians of the Galaxy in **Marvel Super-Heroes** #18 indicated that Vance Astro's

Year or Era	Character[s]	Debut Issue
60) 1960's or 70's	Woodgod	*Marvel Premiere* #31
61) Around 2000	Killraven	*Amazing Adventures* #18
62) 2900's	Charlie - 27	*Marvel Super-Heroes* #18
	Yondu	*Marvel Super-Heroes* #18
	Martinex	*Marvel Super-Heroes* #18
	Nikki	*Marvel Presents* #4

THE BLOOD TRANSFUSION MUST HAVE CAUSED IT! I'VE BECOME A GAMMA-RAY MONSTER-- LIKE POOR DOC!
BUT I'LL LEARN TO LIVE WITH IT! FROM NOW ON, WHATEVER JENNIFER WALTERS CAN'T HANDLE-- THE SHE-HULK WILL DO!

spaceflight took place in the 1980's. The Guardians, like Deathlok, have been forced to drift forward in time as the Marvel Universe caught up with the "future" in which they were supposed to be set. Marvel's four artificial heroes, Warlock, the Vision, Machine Man and Jocasta were born on-panel, so to speak, and present no problem.

The remaining heroes we haven't mentioned so far are mainly judged by adaptations of our standard principles. Captain Britain was in college when he appeared in 1976; we judged him to be 20. American Eagle was described as the older brother of a college graduate so he was considered 25 and placed in 1956. The various members of Alpha Flight were judged by their professions: Vindicator seems clearly the oldest, Shaman a doctor of medicine, Sasquatch a retired football player. The Beaubier twins can be judged by the fact that Aurora's a teacher and Snowbird seems the youngest of the lot [assuming her lifespan is that of a human ...]. Jack of Hearts, Quasar and Barbara Norriss [Valkyrie's former human alter-ego] were all judged by general appearance, while Scott Lange was reckoned by his job, his stint in prison, his having a daughter and general appearance. There are a few minor characters in the list who haven't been mentioned - we'll leave them to the reader as an exercise. But there is one important clutch of super-doers who we've deliberately been avoiding up till now ... out of a sense of dread. These are the characters tied together by ...

The Wundagore Mess: If one had tried to do this article back in about, say 1968, it would have been a much easier task. For one thing, there would have been far fewer characters. For another, there would have been almost fifteen years less time slippage to contend with, making the concept of a Peter Parker born in 1945, more plausible. And most of all, there wouldn't have been any "ex post facto" revisions of characters origins by writers coming in years after the fact. The hands-down winners for characters whose lives are complicated by too many authorial cooks are that mutant duo, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. Trying to explain away all the factors around their origin without throwing any of them away is a problem rivaling the Sherlockian question of how many wives Dr. Watson had.

On the basis of their appearance in **X-Men** #4, one would have to say that Pietro and Wanda were young, but older than the X-Men, perhaps 20 or so. It wasn't really clear which of the two was older, but there was no particular reason to suppose they were twins. This uncomplicated state of affairs persisted until Roy Thomas wrote **Giant-Size Avengers** #1. In that 1974 tale, it was revealed [or so Roy thought] that the parents of Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch were in fact the Whizzer and Miss America of All-Winners Squad fame. Now that seemed like a fun idea at the time. It accounted for what happened to the last two members of the Squad and, as drawn by certain artists, there had always been a resemblance between the Whizzer and Petro and between Miss America and Wanda. Since there had been previous evidence [**Thor** #135] that the mutant duo had grown up near Wundagore Mountain, Roy threw in the High Evolutionary as a key figure in the flashback story. But, oh! the chronological problems!

First of all, Roy has the Whizzer say, upon meeting Captain America, that the Captain America who the Whizzer knew wasn't the present-day Cap [and Roy footnoted it as being the Cap of the '50's, a remark which Roy himself would later contradict.] Well, that was implausible even then, since according to the '50's Cap-meets-Steve Rogers story [**Cap** #154-156], the hapless fellow didn't take the identity of Captain American until 1954. At least this flaw would be rectified. More serious was the fact that Roy implied with this that the All-Winners Squad stories actually did take place after Steve Rogers took his famous swan dive into the icy waters. If that's so [and it's since been corroborated by **What If?** #4 and later stories], then the retirement of the Whizzer and Miss America would have taken place in late 1946, at the earliest. Then they have to [a] get married, [b] go to work at a nuclear reactor, [c] have Nuklo, their first, monstrous child, [d] get Madeline pregnant again and [e] travel to Eastern Europe - all before Pietro and Wanda's birth. Therefore, **if** Pietro and Wanda were really Bob Frank's kids, they couldn't have been born before 1948, at the very earliest. Pietro and Wanda were **16** in **X-Men** #4.

But that's not all. Various folk at Marvel, notably Mark Gruenwald and John Byrne, had noted discrepancies between the Roy Thomas version of their childhood [which had them simply staying in Wundagore after Bob Frank abandoned them until they ran away] and various old references to their parents [e.g., Pietro promising them to protect Wanda]. Not wishing to let such oddities lie when they could be milked for a story plot, **Avengers** #185-187 was born. In this story, we learn that the mutant twins were not in fact the children of Bob and Madeline Frank, but of a woman named Magda and her mysterious power-mad husband, from whom she fled to Wundagore [and who we later found out was Magneto.] Not only did the new, revised origin tie together a vast number of Marvel characters including those above, Spider-Woman, Modred the Mystic and the Werewolf, but it still didn't resolve the problems introduced by Roy Thomas! The revised version still involved the Franks being present at Wundagore at the time of the twin's birth.

One final complication has recently been introduced. Chris Claremont, leading advocate of revisionist Marvel chronology, has recently asserted [**X-Men** #150, 161] that Magneto was a prisoner at Auschwitz as a youth and that his family died there. Hmmmm ... if Magneto was a child at Auschwitz, how did he father those two in 1948? Sigh ...

BUT I MUST FIND A WAY TO INFLUENCE HIM ... TO CONTROL HIM!
AH! YOU ARE WHAT I NEED! ONCE HE SETS HIS EYES ON THE SCARLET WITCH, HE'LL BE PUTTY IN OUR HANDS!

Well, in the best tradition of trying to fit all the old and new wine into a single wineskin at the same time, here's a composite timeline for Magneto and the kids:

[1] Magnus is born in 1946. [2] In 1944, his mutant powers still undiscovered, he and his parents are imprisoned in Auschwitz. There he meets the girl, Magda. His parents are executed. The shock awakens his mutant powers, but only a little to begin with. He uses them to escape with Magda. [3] They are wed in 1945, after the fall of Hitler. Magnus's powers are increasing rapidly. [4] Magda becomes pregnant and becomes fearful of Magnus. She flees to Wundagore. [5] Pietro and Wanda are born in 1946, on the night of Chthon's attack on Wundagore. Chthon is driven off by the magician Magnus [more confusion!] the High Evolutionary and the Knights of Wundagore, but lays an enchantment on Wanda. [6] The children are brought to the attention of the High Evolutionary. He debates the wisdom of keeping them in Wundagore and finally decides that the best course would be to find some way to send them overseas to America. [7] No possibility offers itself until in 1948, when the Whizzer and Miss America come to the vicinity of Wundagore. The High Evolutionary invites them up, intending to offer the children to them for adoption. [8] Madeline Frank gives birth to a stillborn child and dies. [9] Bova presents the twins to Bob Frank as his own children, not realizing that in the cold light of day, he'd never mistake two-year old children for newborns. He panics with grief over the death of his wife and runs away. [10] Exasperated with the situation, the High Evolutionary presents the kids to a gypsy couple, hoping that their wanderings will keep them out of the way of their mysterious father. So the twins will be 18 when they meet the X-Men, no older than Hank McCoy, but matured beyond their years by their hard life. This explains how Magneto could be at Auschwitz without his powers [since otherwise he would have destroyed the camp and probably flown to Hitler and killed him out of hand], yet gain them in time to frighten his pregnant wife who must give birth in the mid to late Forties. Whoosh!

There is another character in the mess, though: Jessica Drew. In Jessie's second orgin [**Spider-Woman** #1], she learns that she was not in fact a mutated spider, but that she was an ordinary girl transformed by her father's spider-serum and the uncanny machine of the High Evolutionary and that she had been in suspended animation for some years. As elaborated in the origin of Wanda and Pietro, her accident had occurred in the early days of Wundagore, before Magda arrived. More recently, in **Spider-Woman** #44, Chris Claremont asserted that she had been in suspended animation for thirty years and that her mother, Meriem Drew, had been a servant of Chthon for fifty years. Now, we don't know how Chris fits this into the revisionist chronology, but in ours, her cryogenic slumber must have ended somewhat before the High Evolutionary and his Knights departed Earth in **Thor** #135 [1966]. She was then left in Bova's care for a time until she wandered away and fell into the hands of Hydra sometime before 1976. So if she was on ice for 30 years before 1966, and she was about five when she was stuck in cold storage, she must have been born in 1931. Q.E.D.

On Revisionism: The revisionist Marvel timeline, also known as compressed time, asserts that time does pass in the Marvel Universe, but at something less than a 1:2 ratio. According to this view, somewhere between eight and ten years have elapsed in the Marvel Universe since the founding of the Fantastic Four. Not only that, but in a recent comic convention, Roger Stern asserted that stories were in the works that would explain that Col. Fury of SHIELD "didn't" fight in World War II, and that Tony Stark didn't injure his heart in Vietnam, but in some unnamed brushfire war somewhere in the world. Well, we don't like all this. It's probably inevitable - the world doesn't seem to be ready for Peter Parker to undergo a mid-life crisis or for Daredevil to need a hearing aid. And it's probably a better solution than the DC approach of having Superman perpetually frozen at 29, Batman at 28 and Superboy zooming though history to keep pace. [Yesterday, Superman met President Kennedy; today, a young Superboy meets President Kennedy; tomorrow, Superbaby at the Watergate break-in??] It might be possible to prove from internal evidence that the revisionist scheme as presently believed doesn't work - say by counting Christmas stories and Halloween stories - but it's probably not worth the effort.

Still, though it may be a necessary evil, revisionism does cheapen the inter-personal relationships in the books. Characters whose friendships have been forged over the years instead became buddies overnight. At one point in the Phoenix debate, if memory serves, Chris Claremont asserted that the bond between Jean and Scott wasn't that terribly strong; after all, they'd only known each other for five years! ["That" theory, if ever held, has since been dropped.] Also, no two writers have the same idea about how fast time is flowing. Working from a 1:1 correspondence with real time is at least convenient for continuity. Revisionism also [sniffle ...] takes a lot of the fun out of just such scholarly efforts as this one.

In summary, this is a first salvo into this area of Marvel scholarship. If anyone wishes to correct, add to, or even [horrors!] contradict us entirely, we welcome it. In fact, a revisionist history version of the chronology would be fun to see [using 1982 as the baseline]. Send all criticisms, comments and conundrums to Comic Fandom's Forum and we'll see what we can do.

KATHOLICITY

What if What If was cancelled and replaced by a different comic - and the sooner the better? The trouble is, it is a good idea gone to waste. Let's face it, they are "never" going to show us what happens if Conan defeats Red Sonja in combat, not that we can't take a good guess. And the current What If Spider-Man was Daredevil while Captain America walked in the Hyborian Age and Nick Fury never got an eyepatch because he was 4 different people, plots do tend to provoke the reaction "Who Cares?". I think Marvel should give up the idea entirely and let the originators of the Imaginary Story have a go at the format. So here are some of my ideas for DC's 'Just Imagine'

Superman once visited an alternate world where he was a crook. Flash visited possibly the same world, where he too was a crook - and the Mirror Master was a hero. A closer look at that world might be interesting, especially if it explained how the heroes and villains got their motives reversed. Superman could have fallen into other hands than the Kents' and been reared dishonest. Fortunately, the noble and brilliant scientist, Lex Luthor, who never lost his hair or his moral standards on this world, is there to hold him in check. Bruce Wayne's parents walked into a shoot-out between the police and criminals and were cut down by police bullets, giving him a pathological hatred of law and order. Green Arrow was so embittered by the loss of his fortune he decided to emulate Robin Hood in deadly earnest, robbing the rich and giving to the poor. To poor Oliver Queen to be exact. Whereas Green Lantern is an agent of a group of blue fanatics determined to rule the Universe - only the heroic deserter from their ranks, Sinestro, dares oppose him. Etc., etc.

Or suppose Earth-1's Superman was to turn totally, irrevocably bad. It should not be beyond Lex Luthor to invent an irreversible mind-warping ray and rather than fight Superman himself, he could sit back and watch the Justice League do it for him. And if Superman used his powers ruthlessly and had no compunction about killing, he would be a match for the whole of the rest of the League who would probably end up having to kill him to stop him - if they could. They would almost certainly suffer some fatalities themselves in the process.

Then there was Abin Sur, crash-landed on Earth, dying and needing to select a replacement Green Lantern in some haste. Presumably his ring-probe worked under some constraints in doing that. We know that the person chosen had to be exceptionally courageous, of high moral integrity and having a strong will. We may assume also that he or she must be in perfect health and physically strong, but should be a typical specimen of the dominant race of the planet on which they would be based, thus ruling out immigrants from other planets or natives whose abilities, through mutation or external influence, differed greatly from the norm. Now, suppose Hal Jordan, Guy Gardner and John Stewart all happened to be out of the ring's range [they had all won free holidays in Europe in a competition] and the lot fell instead on Bruce Wayne. Or Oliver Queen. Or Ray Palmer, not yet the Atom. Or [don't laugh, she meets all the conditions] Lois Lane.

Anyone remember the girl called Misty, she who was used and I do mean used by the robot Teacher to test Superboy's ethics? [See DC SUPERSTARS #12 - RL] Now Misty, or whatever her name really was, and Superboy, it is very clearly implied, actually did have an affair. They are seen embracing in a house which, we have been told previously, has nobody else in it. Cut to Ma Kent, complaining about Superboy's all-night patrols. As it was probably a first experience for both of them - it is questionable whether they took any precautions. So it is quite possible that she could have become pregnant. My, but the poor girl would have been in an unfortunate position. She had, after all, forgotten that she ever knew Superboy. She wouldn't be able to remember who her child's father was - though she could take a good guess if it grew up super-powered. Suppose then that she somehow managed to keep it a secret until in the present, Superman suddenly discovered he had to cope with a thirteen-year-old, illegitimate, probably more than somewhat resentful son, or daughter or twins. And what would Lois say? No, I don't suppose the Code would stand for that one.

But what I'd really like to see is a story on what would have happened had the Kryptonian scientist who managed to save his baby son been an inhabitant of Vathlo Island. The home, in case anyone doesn't know, of a highly developed black race who, despite being a numerical minority, were never colonized or enslaved by the white race. [Presumably the fact that the white race had been enslaved by aliens once or twice had given them an abhorence of the practise.] Assuming the child had landed in the same place as Kal-El did - would the Kents, in the social climate of the 50's, have had the courage or the inclination, to adopt a black baby? If they did, how would Smallville society [have you noticed Smallville doesn't seem to have any black population?] treat him and them? If not, what chance would he have of being adopted in a time when nearly all illegitimate children went for adoption, and the adopters were mostly white? He could have spent all his formative years in an institution and very probably one in a ghetto at that. And when he went public - how would the world react to a black Superman? He would grow to manhood during the great civil rights campaigns of the 60's - just imagine the effect both on him and by him. Especially if Lois Lane still fell in love with him.

And now for something completely different. One day Bruce Banner was walking down the road when a Charles Atlas graduate jostled him into the gutter. Getting mad, he changed into the Hulk and, as usual, his shirt ripped off. But this time his purple pants at last gave up under the strain and ripped off too. On the opposite side of the street, it so happened, Linda Lovelace was walking and when she saw the Hulk letting it all hang out, she made a beeline across the road to get at him. Unfortunately, a huge lorry sped by and splat went Linda Lovelace. The moral of this little story is that you should "never" start to cross the road if the green man is flashing.

— Kathleen Glancy

OH NO! I'M ABOUT TO CHANGE!
I'M ABOUT TO BECOME THE HULK!
I THINK I'M ABOUT TO LOSE MY PG RATING!

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Who Killed Roger Rabbit?

by Margaret O'Connell

Ever wonder how cartoon characters like Wile E. Coyote manage to get blown up, run over and enticed over the edges of cliffs half a dozen times a day and still survive? Gary Wolf, author of **Who Censored Roger Rabbit?** [St. Martin's Press, $10.95], hands-down winner of the Weirdest Hard-Boiled Detective Story Award for 1982 [or any other year], has the answer:

> What I saw wasn't really her [**Who Censored Roger Rabbit**'s incarnation of the prerequisite hard-boiled thriller **femme fatale**]. It was a mentally projected duplicate of her, or doppelganger as 'toons call them. Identical to her in every regard, physically and mentally, but existing only by the energy of her mind. 'Toons can create doppelgangers more or less at will. They merely relax, channel their thoughts in that direction and magically one of them appears. 'Toons use them as doubles in risky shots. When you see a 'toon stuffed into a trombone or run over by a steamroller or crushed by a falling safe, it's really a doppelganger.

The sultry redhead whose doppelganger inspires these musings is none other than Jessica Rabbit, estranged wife of the title character. Despite her misleading married name, Jessica is not a cartoon bunny like her husband, but a humanoid 'toon whose features are only exaggerated in all the right places to make her an ideal model for ads that push their products by means of liberal applications of cheesecake. "Easily able to pass for human ... like most humanoid 'toons, Jessica suppressed her word-balloons and spoke vocally only, thus enhancing even further her human image." She thus avoids the bizarre clutter created by a conversation with a funny animal or "barnyard", 'toon like her estranged spouse "whose words came out encased in a balloon that floated over his head ... [and burst] in a shower of dust that layered his shoulders with the fine powder unknowledgeable humans mistook for dandruff." When Roger Rabbit gets excited, as he does whenever the subject of his adored ex-wife comes up, "the words inside the balloon flicker on and off like a decrepit neon sign" or appear in "a scrolly, illuminated balloon that could have been ripped straight out of a prayer book".

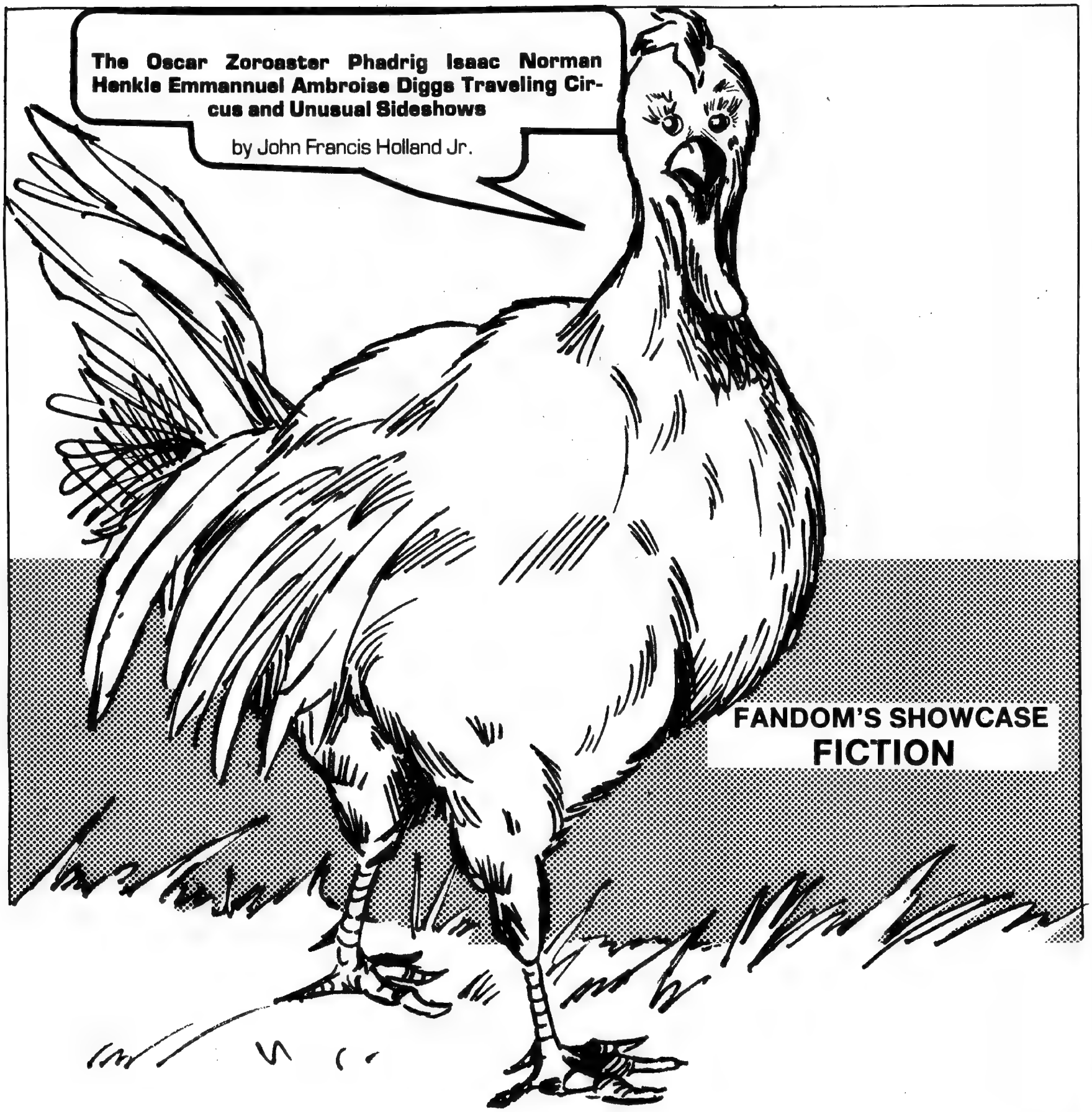
Fascinating as all this may be to the Earth-Real comics-fan reader, it's just another everyday annoyance to Eddie Valiant, the down-on-his-luck human private eye whom Roger hires to find out why the DeGreasey brothers, the owners of his syndicate, seem to be out to get him. Like most humans in this mixed-media world, Eddie dislikes 'toons, whom he - and almost everyone else - regards as an inferior species. When his furry cartoon client shows up at Eddie's apartment in the middle of the private eye's weekly poker game, his card-playing cronies are aghast:

> Billy leaned over and whispered in my ear, "What's with the 'toon, Eddie? I thought we agreed when we started this game. No women and no 'toons."
>
> [Eddie attempts to explain.]
>
> "You're working for a 'toon?" said Jess incredulously.
> "Cash me in", said Harry. "I got business elsewhere."
> "Ditto", said Billy. The three of them collected their money and walked out the door.

Eddie's neighbors are a little less finicky, but only because they're used to it.

> [The rabbit] didn't draw so much as a second glance from the people out front on the street. Shows you what the world's coming to. I can still remember the first 'toon who moved into this neighborhood. A good-looking guy, humanoid, a dead rin-ger for Smilin' Jack. Real personable and as near normal as a 'toon could be. That was twenty years ago, and people marched through the streets in protest. They lost; he stayed. Now we've got more barnyards than Old MacDonald's farm ... You go into a diner for lunch and the guy on the stool next to you orders a bale of hay. Travel ten feet down any sidewalk and you'll step in at least one deflated moo balloon. And this is what the politicians downtown call social progress.

As can be seen from these quotes, **Roger Rabbit**'s peculiar combination of genres amounts to a head-on collision of conventions from which no cliche escapes unscathed. Although this off-the-wall approach is likely to prove less irresistible to hardcore hardboiled thriller fans than it is to those who, like me, find it difficult to take straight-faced tough-guy detective stories seriously, the book also lives up to its obligations as a mystery story more than adequately, delivering a clever puzzle full of plot twists that are all neatly tied up in a surprise ending - without withholding essential information from the reader. That's more than you can say for **The Maltese Falcon** or many of the other murkily moody muddles of incomprehensible clues, gratuitously counterproductive warnings to get off the case and double-crossing damsels in distress that Wolf is spoofing here. Now if only Bogart were still alive to star in the combination cartoon/live-action screen version of **Who Censored Roger Rabbit?**, Disney Studios are said to be working on right now ...


The Oscar Zoroaster Phadrig Isaac Norman Henkle Emmannuel Ambroise Digge Traveling Circus and Unusual Sideshows
by John Francis Holland Jr.
FANDOM'S SHOWCASE
FICTION

It was a special type of day because it was a special time of year. The day was the tenth which had nothing to do with it, and the month was April which had a lot to do with it. It was not yet summer, but the icy weather was caught in transit; the sun did not burn and the wind did not chill. Rather the sun did what it was created for; the rays of the huge golden orb in the sky provided warmth. The winds that always blew at this time of year were made up of half warmth from the sun and half of the remembrance of winters gone by. The cool wind was just enough to offset the heat of the sun and make you glad to be alive.

There was more to make this day different, this season wonderfully special. The beauty of the land was highlighted like at no other time. The grass was the color of joy and the sky was the color of happiness. The clouds in the sky were big and puffy white; they looked more like islands in the sky than an accumulation of water vapor. The lake was as clear and perfect as an unblemished mirror.

Birds sang merrily overhead. The sound of the family of beavers that lived at the other end of the lake reached my ears. Further off in the woods sounded the roar of some wild beast.

It was spring eternal.

Here in the midst of all this beauty and joy I sat with a scowl on my face. With all this life surrounding me I brooded. What was I doing here? I wondered for the ten thousanth time since dawn. Alone I was, in a cabin in the middle of the woods by a lake which in itself was in the middle of nowhere. Only ten miles or so from here as the crow flies was Cowley, my hometown; which was nowhere itself.

This had all started out as a return to the place of my birth. The conquering hero returns home. And that was me - the conquering hero in a nutshell. Local boy makes good, the headlines would have read if the people had cared. I had left Cowley poor as a beggar and returned rich as a millionaire which I was. But in the process, I had lost something and I was now on a backwards search through my life in hopes of finding it, whatever it was. But Cowley provided only a resting place in my search and a poor one at that. The people were indifferent to my success and thus to me. All they wanted to talk about was of the years that I had lived there and nothing of the time spent away from the town.

So I had hired a jeep and a cabin and came here in solitude. I was close enough to Cowley in my mind to believe that I had kept my promise to myself to spend a couple of weeks there.

I sat in a rocker that had been here when I arrived and stared out across the lake. A duck flew down and alighted on the surface of the lake, and I was glad I was not a hunting man. I watched in something akin to the fascination of a child as the duck paddled around on the mirror of the lake. What was so unusual about a duck I asked myself. And I knew the answer lay in the not asking of the question, so I cursed my city breed cynicism.

The wind shifted from the east and the smell of daisies blooming to the west and new smells. Smells that baffled my inquiring nose and yet still managed to make my mouth water with anticipation. Smells that I could not place, smells that I knew but could give no name to. It was then when I realized that the smells were familar yet unrecognizable that I placed them. Popcorn and cotton candy, straw and sweat. Smells from a country fair that Cowley was putting on? But I thought that Cowley lay to the North of my cabin. Ah, no matter where the smells came from, the memories that they brought back were enough to satisfy me. I remember when I was eleven or perhaps twelve, and the month was the same as it is now. School was out which is in itself enough for boys to celebrate, for Easter vacation, but we had more to be glad about. The Turner Five Ring Traveling Circus and Freak Show was coming to Cowley and there is nothing in the world that excites a boy as much as a circus.

It was the first day of vacation and my best friend Jimmy and I were watching them set up the tents for the show. We could not wait for the show to begin - just imagine five rings! That was always the big pride of Mister Turner - his circus had five rings; what he did not tell you was that the five rings contained no more than the normal three. The six or seven hours till the first show seemed an eternity to our youthful minds, so we did what any boys would do in our situation and sneaked

down among the circus workers. While we were sneaking around, we passed a trailer with the door ajar. One look at Jimmy and I new that he was thinking the same thing I was. Using all the skill we had acquired within our twelve years, we crept up to the open door and peered inside. It took our eyes a few seconds to adjust to the gloom of the inside of the trailer, and when they did, we gasped in shock. There seated at a dressing table was a man making himself into Leo the Lion Man. My child mind recalled that a few of the circus performers were supposed to appear downtown today and Leo was among them. Thus his early preparations. But Leo was supposed to be half lion and half man, and all crazy; when he appeared downtown he would do so in a cage. Leo, one of the best exhibits, was a fake.

After a minute or so of watching this man apply the mane to his neck, we left. We broke and ran; leaving the circus far behind until we came to our favorite hiding place deep within the woods. We sat for long minutes without speaking, the shock had been too great. We were at the age that we openly disbelieved in all the wonders of the circus, but secretly longed for them to be true. Jimmy was the first to speak, "I knew it all along.".

I stood from my chair and rubbed at my eyes. My thought patterns were chaotic. I had begun with a pleasant memory and it ended up with one of the worst moments of my childhood. I walked down the steps of the cabin and headed towards the lake. My mood was terrible, but the world did its best to cheer me up. The air sparkled and to my untrained eye there seemed to be magic in the clouds. Funny, I haven't believed in magic since I was twelve.

I was watching a duck struggle with a fish as I approached the lake. My gaze was ahead which explains why I did not see my visitor approach. It was not until I was at the shore of the lake when I heard a sound to my right, the noise of a chicken scratching the ground for food. I turned and that was exactly what stood before me. A chicken.

"You're a long way from home, chickie." For at least ten miles, as far as I knew, there were no farms between here and Cowley. And this chicken did not look wild, she was too well kept to look the part of even a farm bird. She looked more like a pet than anything else and for the life of me I could not understand how a pet had wandered this far from home.

"A lot farther than you think, Bud."

My thoughts stopped, any word that I was about to utter died on my tongue. Had this chicken actually talked? No, impossible; I've been by myself too long.

"As simple as that I believed. I accepted this chicken talking with no more questions."

"Didn't your mother teach you any manners. Where I come from it is considered polite to speak when spoken to." The chicken looked like a normal fowl and its speech could even be considered normal if you were comparing it to human normal. There was a slight scratching in her words, but very minimal.

What was I doing? Comparing the voice of a chicken to the voice of a human. I had to be imagining this. Chickens don't talk. Do they?

"Hey, anybody home? I like carrying on one sided conversations as much as the next chicken, but don't you think this is a little ridiculous?"

And as simple as that I believed. I accepted this chicken talking with no more questions. Perhaps I needed something unbelievable to believe in.

"I'm sorry. You just took me by surprise." The back of my mind was calling me a fool for talking to a bird, but the rest of me did not care. As I said before, there's magic in the air and finally, finally after all these years! The magic is effecting me. I felt like I had when I had been twelve and watching the Turner Five Ring Circus being put together; before Jimmy and I had stumbled into the secret of Leo the Lion Man and magic itself.

The hen scratched the ground with its claw and turned her little head in my direction. "That's better. My name is Bill. What is yours?"

I am afraid that I smiled at this and let a small chuckle escape me. Bill did not take this in stride. "What's so funny?"

I shook my head to clear it from the cobwebs that had been accumulating within my mind over the years. "Once again I apologize. But it seems unusual that you are named Bill, after all you are not a rooster. And Bill is a masculine name."

"Says who! You goofball humans are the ones that make names masculine and feminine, not us animals. A chicken by any name cackles just as loudly. I'll tell you what though, I am sick and tired of being told what to call myself. For a while I used to call myself by the feminine of my name, but no more."

I was not even going to try and understand her philosphy, it sounded too right for me. And I was not going to try and explain the ways of man and argue with her. So I did the best thing, I merely accepted. "Fine with me. If you say your name is Bill, then Bill it is. My name is Phil and I am glad to meet you Bill."

I glanced down at the ground and when I saw that it was barren, I sat. Now Bill and I were on a more level acquaintance. It was then that I noticed that Bill was yellow. I had seen her color when I first saw her, of course, but I had not taken notice of it and my mind simply filed away white as her feather color.

"What are you doing out here in the middle of nowhere, Bill? If I am not prying?" I resolved to keep my manners up with this chicken. I did not need any more etiquette lessons from a farm bird.

"I could ask the same about you and I might later. But to answer your question is that I am part of a circus. I got tired of them though so I decided to explore ahead of them. They are not too far behind me. I would not wander too far from them. They may get on my nerves once in a while, but overall I like them."

I was right. I had smelled a circus. "You mean that there is a circus coming my way." I was as excited as a school child. "The cotton candy I smelled earlier was really cotton candy."

Bill shook her head in dismay. She probably thought I was insane. "If you smelled it then I guess that is really what it is."

"I resolved to keep my manners up with this chicken. I did not need any more etiquette lessons from a farm bird."

"I was right. I had smelled a circus."

I knew that they would not set up here, but perhaps they would stop and talk for awhile. And if they were heading for Cowley, I could go see them there. I was more excited than I could remember being in years. This circus was special, I could tell already. How many circuses had talking hens? Real talking hens?

"What are you doing here, to paraphrase you correctly, in the middle of nowhere?"

"Phil!" My thoughts were yanked back to the here and now. Bill stood regarding me with anger. It was almost enough to make me laugh. Have you ever seen an angry chicken?

"I'm sorry, I didn't hear you. What did you say?"

"What is it with you? Have I stumbled upon an insane asylum? What I asked you before was what are you doing out here? There is no one or nothing around for miles."

How do I explain myself to a chicken? How do I tell her that I had carved out a life that I had always dreamed of, and yet I was still unsatisfied? How do I explain that my dream life is just a farce? That behind the wealth, the land, the jet setting, the constant night clubbing, the women on a revolving pedestal, that behind all this and more was nothing. No, not nothing, what hid behind all this was a lonely, frightened man who had nothing to live for and more recently had no wish to live. Do I tell her that I am holed up here, afraid to go to my own hometown, becoming more afraid of life itself, trying to find an answer to the question of 'why live?', and not sure that there is an answer worth seeking. "To be truthful, Bill, I'm not sure why I am here. The life I left had nothing to give me and I was hoping to find something worthwhile here."

Bill's head was bobbing up and down in sympathy to me and looking into her eyes I fancied I had found a friend. "Oh, one of those 'chuck the modern world and return to nature' things. Listen Phil, I can understand how you feel. Here I am, a chicken in a world I never made. I can appreciate the urge to toss it all into the garbage can and go back to pecking for worms in the wild. Technology can be a scary thing, but it can also be something wonderful. It all depends on your viewpoint. You, not you personally, but others of your kind created it so you personally have to learn how to live with it. It's this way, Phil, you have to be smarter than the technology you use. As long as you keep that in mind, you can accomplish wonderful things with technology. I mean I would rather ride than walk."

I started to argue. "But it is not like that ..." I let it trail off unsaid. For was it like that? At least partly? I had not thought so, but some of what Bill said struck close to the heart.

Bill respected my silence. She engaged in other activities. In her scratching she had come upon a worm and was now pulling it out of the dirt. In two bites it was gone, and she looked up from her snack to stare directly into my eyes. We were not quite level so she had to look up. As I sat there and stared back, I was glad that Bill had come stumbling into my life.

"Think about it. I gotta get going. If anyone from the circus comes by asking about me, tell them that I decided to go ahead a little further. Tell them to camp here and I'll be back soon." And with that she half flapped and half ran into the woods and was soon gone from sight.

I sat there in the sand and played with the rocks. I would scoop a pebble up and then toss it with a side arm throw into the lake. I tried to see how many times I could make a pebble skip before the rock would sink. The ducks were all gone.

Could what Bill said be true? Was I, perhaps subconsciously, afraid of the technology the human race had created? Did I fear that we had created a Frankenstein monster? No, I answered. Yet why have I always thought of Cowley, a village that existed almost as it did a century ago, as the ideal? Why, when my troubles became too much for me, did I flee back to nature as it is so aptly put? Perhaps I did, in fact I was sure at least part of me did, but I knew that that was only part of the problem and the much larger one still remained. The joy had gone out of life and technology had nothing to do with that.

I threw one more stone into the lake and watched as it skipped once, then twice and finally sunk to the muddy bottom. I rose and made my way back to the cabin. Would I still believe in Bill when I woke up tommorrow morning or would I put it down to some wild hallucination? I decided to think about it after breakfast.

One of the most pleasant odors in the world is that of bacon frying. I turned the heat down as low as possible and listened as the bacon cooked. Intermingled within the crackling and popping of the bacon came a loud knocking. At first my attention was fixed on the food and the knocking did not reach me. When I realized that someone was pounding on my door I also realized that the pounding had been going on for the good part of ten minutes. I hurried to the door with a question - who could be knocking on my door? Was it Bill, returned so soon? It could not be Bill I surmised, for the knocking was coming from too high up the door to be her. Thinking of Bill made me remember that she had said the circus was coming this way. Perhaps it was them, stopping by for a bite to eat and a bit of conversation.

The knocker did not look like he came from any circus I have ever seen. He was shaggy - the best word I could think of. Not dirty, for I could see that his features were clean but shaggy. His clothes were unkept and his hair fell around his shoulders in a mess. His beard was no better, part of it going one way while another part went a completely different direction. The most unusual thing about him though was his cleanliness; one would not think a person in his condition would be clean. Even his clothes were clean - he was just shaggy.

"Excuse me, sir. But have you seen a yellow hen recently?"

What could I say? "If her name is Bill, I have."

When he smiled, I saw that even his teeth were clean, being so white as to sparkle. "Then you have seen her. And, ah, know about ..." He ended in a flounder so I thought it polite to help him out.

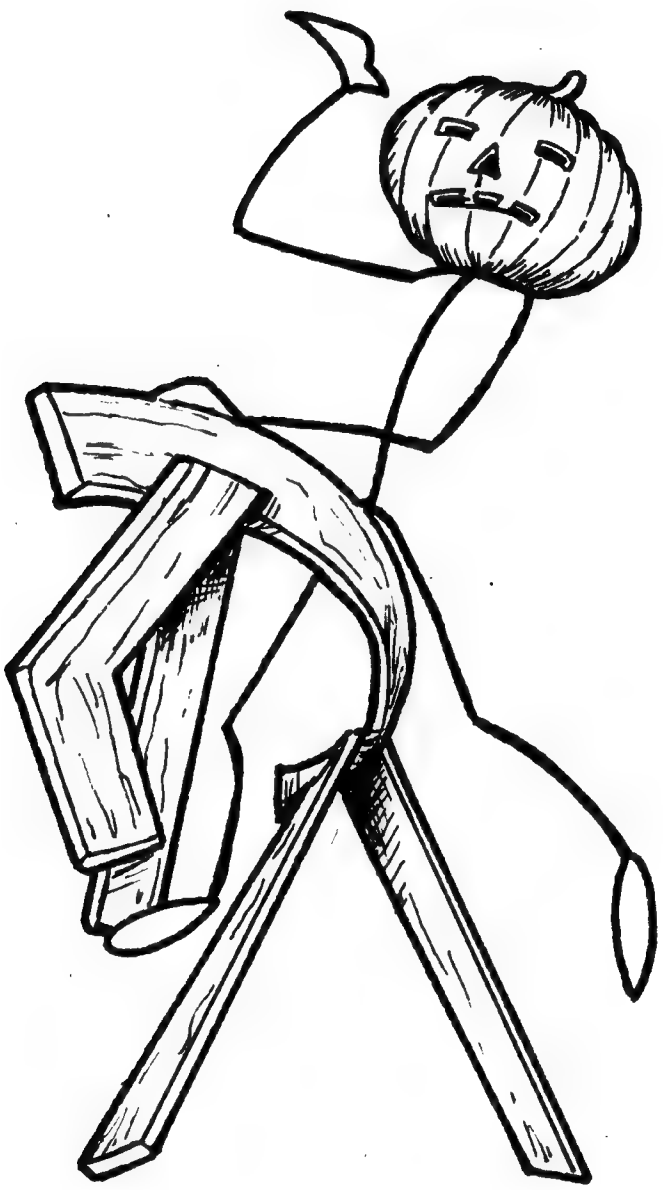
"That she is a most unusual bird, yes."

I decided that talking in the doorway was silly, so I motioned him in. We entered the living room and sat on two worn out chairs that had come with the place. "My name is Phil. And as a certain bird took me to task for I will try and be polite to you. Care for some breakfast?

The shaggy man took a few minutes to settle in the chair. When he deemed that he had found a comfortable position, he addressed me. "I am known as Leviticus. No thank you for the food. I just ate a little while ago. I hate to be impatient but could you tell me when you saw Bill last. We're getting a little worried about her; she has been gone a while."

"You just missed her, Leviticus."

Leviticus held up an imploring hand. "Please just call me Lev. It rolls off the tongue much easier."



"I've been with the circus for the last couple of years. Before that I was what you would call a bum."

"As you wish, Lev. Anyway, Bill left here not more than twenty minutes ago. She stopped by and we had a quick chat. When she left, she told me to give you a message if anyone came looking for her."

"Which was?" Leviticus was leaning forward, his face cupped in hands and his entire attention given over to me. I could tell that he loved Bill very much and the situation did not even give me pause to snicker.

"That she would be back shortly and to make camp here. She said that she felt like exploring some more and she would be back before you break camp."

He leaned back with a sigh and a smile crossed his lips for the first time since he had stepped into my cabin. "Yes, that is very much like her. To go running off without regard to others. She is a tyrant for courtesy in others, but sometimes forgets to live by her own rules. But please, I see that I interrupted your breakfast. Go back to it and if you do not mind, I will sit here and wait for the others to catch up to me. I was wandering slightly ahead of them in my search for Bill."

So I did. My hunger of just a few minutes ago vanished with the excitement of the knowledge that the circus was coming! I made a sandwich of the bacon and added a glass of orange juice to complete my meal. I brought the food into the living room with me.

"You sure you don't want anything?"

He assured me that he was not hungry. I finished quickly and without any further interruptions with talk. Leviticus was content to let me finish eating before he said any more and I was too busy stuffing the food down my throat to say anything. When I had eaten the last bite, I sat back in my chair and addressed myself to Leviticus.

"How long have you been with the circus, Lev?"

"I've been with the circus for the last couple of years. Before that I was what you would call a bum. I used to wander around the country, making a living as best as I could. It was not a productive life, but I enjoyed it. But when the circus came along, I decided to stay with them for awhile."

As Leviticus was finishing up, the sounds of a calliope could be heard drifting along the winds. The song was nameless, but the joy contained within its notes could be felt. A tingling that I have not felt since I was a boy during the night before Christmas, went up my spine and I found a huge grin plastered across my face.

"It's been a long time since you've seen a circus?" Leviticus asked me.

I shook my head, but the grin was still there. "A very long time."

"Then" and now Leviticus was grinning, "why don't we go outside and see it."

I could not have agreed with Leviticus more. I reached the door first and as my hand grasped the doorknob, a shiver of terror went up my back; in the long run, I hesitated. Leviticus' voice from behind me wanted to know what was wrong. What could I tell him? That I was afraid of being disappointed, that the circus had let me down once before and that I did not want to be let down again. That I wanted, no, needed this circus to be more than just a collection of old men with paste-on manes. In the end I said, "Nothing. What are we waiting for? Let's go see the circus." Behind me, though I could not see him, Leviticus was smiling.

Standing on the porch, the smells that I had smelled earlier overwhelmed my senses. Cotton candy mixed with sweat, straw intermingled with popcorn; while all this was assimilated by the calliope. The circus was here.

Coming towards my house from the woods were a dozen and a half wagons. The lead wagon was pulled by a strong, old horse that wore a straw hat to keep the flies off his face. As the wagons pulled abreast to my cabin, I heard the driver of the lead wagon cry a "Whoa Jim" and the caravan halted. When I saw the writing on the side of the lead wagon, my smile turned to an outright laugh. 'The Oscar Zoroaster Phadrig Isaac Norman Henkle Emmannuel Amboise Diggs Traveling Circus and Unusual Sideshows'. Lev came to my side and winked. "He is a little bit winded, I admit. He says that he got that name because his father was an overblown politician who liked to talk."

My attention, though, had already left the overnamed Mr. Diggs and traveled to the wagon behind. The wagon was smaller than any other in the line and the most unusual. The puller of the wagon was a live wooden sawhorse and the rider was a figure made out of sticks with a pumpkin head.

That was as far as my gaze went down the line, for

Oscar Zoroaster etc. Diggs was calling to me. "Ho! And would you be the owner of this land?"

"At the moment." I answered.

"Then kind sir, we the circus of Oscar Zoroaster Phadrig Isaac Norman Henkle Emmannuel Ambroise Diggs of whom I am the aforementioned would request your kind permission to make camp upon your land." I muttered an okay, he had said his entire name without a pause for breath. Mr. Diggs was just as over blown as his politican father could ever be.

The wagons moved away to set up in a circle in front of the cabin. Leviticus took me by the arm and lead me down the stairs, toward the circus. "Come and meet my friends."

The long winded owner of the circus met us before we reached the wagons. But once again my attention had left Mr. Diggs and was on the wagon that contained the pumpkinhead. The pumpkin I saw had the usual pumpkin face carved in it and as I watched, the head turned to the interior of the wagon and the pumpkinhead spoke. "Father, we are stopping for a rest. You can come out now." I waited in anticipation for the father of this pumpkinhead to emerge. My imagination quelled at the thought of what he would look like. Still nothing I had imagined could come close to the truth. The father of the pumpkinhead was a little girl of about twelve years.

Leviticus and I reached his boss. We shook hands. "You already know my name so I will not make you hear me repeat it. Just call me Oscar."

"My name is Phil Frank."

The events were engulfing me. Too much was happening too fast. If I took the time and sat down, I would see this circus for the sham that it was. But I did not want to. I wanted to believe even if I knew I was believing in the impossible.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Frank." With that simple sentence, I felt an affection for Oscar Diggs that I have rarely felt for anyone. Of the million and a half times that I have heard that phrase "glad to meet you", I have never truly believed that the person was really glad to meet me. And the billion times that I have said it without meaning it. But when this pudgy circus owner said he was glad to meet me, I believed it. And I was glad to meet him.

While Leviticus filled Oscar in on the adventures of Bill, I took stock of the circus owner. Oscar stood about five feet, perhaps an inch or two over and weighed at least two hundred pounds. But I was to learn that I could never think of him as fat, only pudgy. He had the face of a used car salesman. One look at his face and you had to think "this man is too happy to lie". From the toes of his little feet to the top of his bald head, Oscar Diggs brimmed with joy.

As we talked, we drifted back towards the wagons. We stopped just short of Oscar's wagon. Underneath the wagon, leaning against one of the wheels was a white cat. The cat was cleaning its paws, but ceased when it saw us coming. Oscar had also seen the cat. "Eureka come out from under there. I have a job for you."

Without more than a short pause, Oscar turned his attention to me. "If you don't mind, 'I'll let Eureka show you around our grand and glorious camp. Leviticus and I must see to it that everything is in proper order. We won't be long."

continued next issue

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The continuing adventures of Spanky, Space Cadet, Fandom Showcase, and Fandom Forum complete the issue.

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